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National Threat Perceptions in the Middle East

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# National Threat Perceptions in the Middle East

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#### **NOTE**

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# **Table of Contents**

	Page			
Preface - Sverre Lodgaard				
Chapter 1	Threat Perceptions in the Middle East: A Summary  James Leonard			
1.1 1.2 1.3 1.4 1.5	Introduction1The Arab-Israeli Problem2Internal Threats4Military Threats5Conclusion6			
Chapter 2	The Arab Threat: The Israeli Perspective Shmuel Limone			
Chapter 3	From Geopolitics to Geo-Economics Egyptian National Security Perceptions  Abdel Monem Said Aly			
3.1 3.2 3.3 3.4 3.5 3.6 3.7	Introduction17Geopolitics: The Past18Geopolitics: The Present20Geo-Economics: The Gulf24Geo-Economics: Islamic Fundamentalism26Geo-Economics: The Fear of the Future29Conclusions: From Geopolitics to Geo-Economics30			
Chapter 4	Palestinian Threat Perceptions Yezid Sayigh			
4.1 4.2 4.3	Introductory Remarks31General Definition of Threats33Specific Threat Perceptions34			

iv ))))))))	))))))))	National Threat Perceptions in the Middle I	East
	4.4 4.5	Sources and Types of Threat	
Chap	ter 5	Threat Perceptions from a Jordanian Point of View Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan	47
	5.1 5.2 5.3	Preambule: A Hostile Environment	48
Chap	ter 6	Overcoming Prejudice: A Syrian Perception of the Israeli Threat in the Arab-Israeli Region of Conflict Abdulhay Sayed	61
	6.1 6.2 6.3	Introduction	
	6.4	from Israel	
	6.5	Concluding Remarks	81
Chap	ter 7	Security and Threat Perceptions in Saudi Arabia Saleh Al-Mani	83
	7.1 7.2	Islam and Security	

The Balance of Regional Power and Its Impact

on Saudi Security ...... 91

Internal Threats ...... 92

7.3

7.4

7.5

7.6

7.7

# **Preface**

The UNIDIR project on Confidence-Building and Arms Control in the Middle East is organized around the strategic tenets of co-operative security. The strategic principle of co-operative security is to enhance peace and security through institutionalized consent rather than through physical coercion. It seeks collaborative rather than confrontational relationships among national military establishments. The emphasis is less on preparations to counter threats than on the prevention of threats in the first place. Thus, the significance of confidence-building is obvious. Militarily, the basis for co-operation is mutual acceptance and support for defence of home territory as the exclusive national military objective, and the subordination of power projection to the constraints of international consensus. There is a close relationship, therefore, between co-operative security and non-offensive defence. Finally, a fully developed co-operative security framework would include provisions for collective security as a residual guarantee in the event of aggression.

The project began with a series of background studies to account for the special characteristics, problems and conflicts of the area that motivate the institution of CSBMs and arms control. It has continued with a discussion of the principles that should govern international relations in the region, and a definition of the geographical concept of the Middle East for purposes of confidence building and arms control. Finally, it addresses a number of specific measures that might be taken to enhance international peace and security, essentially following the agenda of co-operative security.

Among the background studies are a series of papers on national threat perceptions. This Report comprises six of them, covering Israel and its neighbours. Later publications will deal with national threat perceptions in the Maghreb and in the Gulf area. Comprehensive analyses of threat perceptions are rare in the Middle East. Yet they are greatly needed in order to tailor specific measures to security needs.

An expert group of some 20 members, mostly from the Middle East, provides guidance and feedback in the elaboration of project plans and reports. So far, the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Janne E. Nolan (ed.), Co-operation and Security in the 21st Century, Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1994.

group has met three times: in Malta 16-17 April 1994; in Antalya, Turkey, 14-19 November 1994; and in Lund, Sweden, 8-11 June 1995. Many members of the group have also been commissioned to prepare papers for the project.

Furthermore, we are conducting smaller workshops on specific issues or draft publications. The first was held in Antalya, in conjunction with the expert group meeting there. Together with authors of national threat perceptions papers, we conducted a joint review of the first draft of these papers. The second was convened in Geneva 26-27 May 1995, to provide feedback on a draft report on the proposal for a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. A third workshop will be held at the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates. This workshop will examine papers on national threat perceptions in the Gulf Area, and discuss options for confidencebuilding and arms control there.

The project is run by Dr Jan Prawitz (Sweden), Ambassador (ret.) James F. Leonard (USA) and Director Sverre Lodgaard of UNIDIR. It is supported by the Ford Foundation, and by the governments of Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States (ACDA). I am grateful to them all for their generous support.

The technical editing of this Report was done by Ms Claudia Querner, Junior Professional Officer at UNIDIR. My cordial thanks to her and to all other project collaborators for their important contributions to a fascinating project.

UNIDIR takes no position on the views and conclusions expressed in these papers which are those of their authors. Nevertheless, UNIDIR considers that such papers merit publication and recommends them to the attention of its readers.

> Sverre Lodgaard Director, UNIDIR

# Chapter 1 Threat Perceptions in the Middle East: A Summary

James Leonard\*\*

#### 1.1 Introduction

Comparing the Middle East with other regions is generally *not* a useful operation; but the parallels and the contrasts between the Middle East since Madrid and Europe since the end of the Cold War do throw some light on how far the Middle East Peace process has advanced and how far it still has to go.

Perceptions of threat and insecurity in Europe for more than forty years were dominated by the Super-Powers rivalry and the Western fear of Soviet Communism. Today that threat has almost vanished. Military establishments are being sharply reduced and are nourished, in the main, by much weaker or more remote concerns: that a new menace might arise from the ashes of the Soviet Union; that disorder in the Balkans or outside of Europe might require large military operations, etc. However serious these remaining problems may appear, they are much less menacing than the old threat. Armed forces form "Vancouver to Vladivostok" are in a downward "glide path".

In the Middle East since Madrid much has changed but a great deal has not. The Arab-Israeli conflict is not what it was five or ten years ago but it has certainly not "vanished" either.

<sup>\*</sup> Summary based on papers and discussions in the UNIDIR project on Confidence-Building and Arms Control in the Middle East.

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#### 1.2 The Arab-Israeli Problem

This conflict continues to occupy a more prominent position than any other single problem, both for Israelis and for most Arabs, but in a number of specific contexts it no longer has the dominant, determining, area-wide role that it occupied for so long. Rather than uniting the Arab states, it tends to divide them, and Israeli opinion is also sharply divided over the dangers and the choices before it. Other concerns, noted below, have emerged, or in some cases have re-emerged from the past. To a degree, these new or revived concerns are replacing the single issue that held sway in the region for almost precisely the same period that the Cold War preoccupied Europe.

The validity of this generalization varies of course, with geography and other factors. Countries remote from Israel were never quite so focused on the problem as were bordering states. They have found it easier to accept the peace process, despite its difficulties, and to move toward normalization with Israel. For them, other threats have thus tended to gain greater salience.

To a considerable degree this seems true of Egypt. Fifteen years after the bilateral peace treaty, the perception of a threat of "Zionist expansionism from the Euphrates to the Nile" appears to be greatly reduced. This does not mean that hostility toward the Jewish state has vanished; not at all. Hostility and even fear in many Egyptian circles remains intense, but its character tends increasingly to be religious, social, economic, or even commercial, rather than military.

There is an important exception: Egyptian concern about Israeli nuclear weapons. This concern appears to have two aspects. One is fear that if another war were to break out, even one that did not involve Egypt, the possible use by Israel of nuclear weapons elsewhere would create a situation that could not fail to affect Egypt. The second concern relates, not to any Israeli use of a nuclear weapon, but rather to the likelihood that the indefinite retention by Israel of its nuclear capability, however ambiguous, will lead some other country in the region to "go nuclear" with grave damage to Egypt's security situation.

Egypt has taken the lead on this issue, but Egypt's concern is widely shared. Any weapons of mass destruction represent long-range threats. Any state in the region must fear that it could be attacked even by a distant state that lacked long-range missiles. Even civil aircraft or clandestine means of delivery could put any city in the region at risk. The terrorism in Tokyo and in Oklahoma City has reminded everyone how vulnerable modern urban societies are.

Israel is, of course, extremely though not uniquely vulnerable. Like the five declared nuclear states, it has adopted deterrence as its way of dealing with the problem, but Israeli officials assert that they are open to the more radical solution of complete elimination, the solution strongly urged by Egypt and others. How this nuclear issue might interact with the threat perceptions arising from conventional military forces is discussed below.

Israel's other neighbors, and the Palestinians, have threat perceptions that range from the rather low Egyptian level up to a level little changed from that obtaining before Madrid

Jordan welcomed the Oslo agreement as making possible its movement to a full peace treaty with Israel. The treaty has, however, by no means put an end to Jordanian fears about its future. The problems between Israel and the PLO are far from solved, and until they are, Jordanians will live in a condition of great uncertainty. Even worse, almost every imaginable solution to these problems next door appears likely to exacerbate Jordan's own problems in one way or another. The difficulty of defining its relationship to the future Palestinian entity or state and the implications for Jordan's own political structure compete for priority with Jordan's immediate economic and social problems, all greatly worsened by the consequences of the Gulf War.

The other end of the spectrum of Arab attitudes is to be found in Syria. There little has changed as a result of Madrid or Oslo. The fear of "Zionist expansionism" remains acute, judging by official pronouncements and unofficial analyses. There appear to be only minimal hopes that negotiations can lead to the return of the Golan or a settlement satisfactory to the Palestinians. Unlike Egypt and Jordan, where the peace treaties reflect a deeper conviction that there will be no more wars, Syria and Israel continue to regard each other with profound concern, focused on South Lebanon but not confined to that unhappy area.

For Israel and the Palestinians, the "Hundred Year War" has entered a new phase, but its end is not yet in sight. From the Israeli viewpoint, the new phase is marked by the gradual acknowledgement that what once seemed unthinkable - Peace with Arabs - is now not only thinkable, it is a fact. It is not a warm peace and it certainly does not extend to all Arabs, but the changes are already seismic.

The most central of all relationships, that with the Palestinians, is however in an ominous condition. The steady stream of violent incidents underline the fears of many Israelis that no mutually acceptable way for the two can ever be found. They fear that the Palestinian objectives embodied in the concept of a Palestinian state are incompatible with any minimal degree of security for Israel, and there is little disposition to run new risks.

Palestinian threat perceptions are if anything even more intense. They live under military occupation in a continuously violent relationship with the Israeli authorities; they have grave doubts that any viable "entity" will be established in the territories (the experience so far in Gaza has not been reassuring to either side); and they fear that the character of Israeli politics precludes further progress and even promises retrogression. Moreover, the developments in the wider Arab world, which give Israelis real hope, only deepen Palestinian despair. They have learned over the years not to expect much help from their fellow Arabs; today they have almost ceased to hope for anything at all.

#### 1.3 Internal Threats

With the Arab-Israeli dispute reaching from center stage, what threats are competing to take its place? Unfortunately, the list is rather long. Most of the emerging military problems are not, however, region-wide, and thus do not seem to point toward a broad military conflict. The Iraqi attacks on Iran and then on Kuwait probably represent the top end of the scale.

Since the UNIDIR project has not yet gone seriously into the problems of the Gulf states, the observations that follow relate principally to the region from Jordan westward to Morocco.

For the states of North Africa, including Egypt, internal developments and international economic problems have supplied more than adequate replacements for the threat perceptions that once centered on Israel. (Some would argue that that always was what psychologists call a "displacement", the transfer of a concern from its real object to a surrogate.) The symptoms of internal disarray are rather similar across these states. Economic development has barely kept pace with population growth. Movement toward democratization and toward free-market economies is slow or invisible. Social ills are growing, modernization generates a variety of tensions, and governments are not seen as responding effectively. Leftist extremism is being replaced with religious extremism, often nourished from

Along with these internal threats to stability and progress, old bilateral quarrels across boundaries (or about boundaries) have become more prominent. When these quarrels, sometimes going far back into history, acquire a quasi-religious or anti-secular character, they can potentially develop into threats to the stability or existence of particular regimes. These also can become threats to fruitful relationships with Western governments, Western investors, etc. Egypt's interdependence with the Gulf, and the interdependence of the Gulf states and the Maghreb with Europe and the United States have increased perceptions of vulnerabilities. Each side of these relationships tends to see the other side as a threat or at least a problem.

5

These difficulties lead to a nervous, even pessimistic attitude. There is not convincing evidence, at least as yet, of a "peace dividend". Domestic unrest discourages development. A downward spiral instead of an upward spiral is widely feared, and the frightening situation in Algeria is on everyone's mind. Israel naturally watches this with apprehension, fearing most of all for the stability of Egypt.

### 1.4 Military Threats

We have mentioned the nuclear problem above, since it appears to be the main military danger perceived today by Egypt, the largest and strongest of all the Arab states. It is interesting and perhaps somewhat provocative to compare Egypt's military situation today with that of the United States. Each has "lost" what it perceived for forty years to be its principal threat: Israel and the Soviet Union. Each retains a military establishment far more powerful than any potential adversary, unless the old enemy somehow reasserts itself. Outsiders are bound to suspect a measure of inertia or momentum in the slow, grudging downsizing of those two military establishments.

The momentum of the pre-1990 regional arms race is far more apparent today in the Gulf, and it was given a major impetus by the Gulf War. The military forces of the Maghreb have never been particularly relevant to the Arab-Israeli conflict; and today, they exist only in relation to each other or to domestic unrest. The military forces of Israel's direct neighbors are another matter. Even with peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan now in place, and negotiations fitfully in train with Syria, Israeli opinion retains its (understandable) habit of thinking in terms of capabilities more than intentions. A change in regime can, after all, alter intentions in a rapid and radical way. The mirror image of this threat perception can be seen on the Arab side.

These threat perceptions have a particular importance in connection with weapons of mass destruction. Israel did not develop its nuclear capability to deter a nuclear threat; in fact, Israeli leaders tended to dismiss the possibility of an "Islamic Bomb" as too remote to enter their calculations. Israeli deterrence was aimed at what it thought was a conventional threat to its very existence.

Therefore, the continued existence of large Arab conventional "capabilities" on its frontiers will continue for some time, until the Israeli perception of "intentions" has evolved, to seem to many Israelis to justify the retention of its nuclear deterrent.

Reductions in Arab capabilities, through arms control agreements or unilaterally, would obviously be helpful in fostering Israeli confidence in the peaceful intentions of its neighbors. This in turn could shift the balance in Israeli threat perceptions, so that fear of nuclear proliferation in the region would be given priority over fear of an overwhelming conventional attack.

Developments, especially since 1979, in Iraq and Iran, have been pushing Israeli threat perceptions in both directions. Israel now sees that an Arab country could indeed build a nuclear weapon, and it fears that Iran may follow suit. The importance of Israel's deterrent capability and the importance of eliminating from the region all weapons of mass destruction are in Israeli eyes both enhanced, yet they are sharply in tension with each other. It is difficult to foresee the positive resolution of this tension until all important states of the region have followed Egypt's example: relinquishing convincingly any ambition to acquire nuclear weapons and any intention to contribute to the destruction of Israel.

#### 1.5 Conclusion

From this brief and partial review of threat perceptions - a review from which the Eastern Middle East, especially the Gulf, is almost completely absent - one conclusion stands out rather sharply. The consolidation of peace in the area requires concurrent progress along three parallel tracks. Two of these are self-evident: the political track (intentions) and the arms control track (capabilities), with confidence-building measures forming a web of connections between the two. Neither of these two lines of action is sufficient in itself. Peace agreements are essential, but taken in isolation they permit the persistence of fears that unduly large military establishments could again become grave threats. Arms control agreements are essential, but in isolation they could co-exist with rhetorical antagonism and could even be mere covers for a renewal of hostilities. Taken together, these two tracks reinforce and validate each other.

Even that, however, is not enough. There must be a third track along which the governments of the region demonstrate their ability to cope with their internal problems and satisfy the aspirations of their peoples. Without this third track, other states will not be confident that a particular country will remain true to its

 7

commitments and will refrain from directing the dissatisfaction of its people against some external target. In an area that has known so many decades of wars and bitter enmities, confidence that a new situation has come to stay can build only slowly, through the passage of time and the demonstrated ability to solve the problems that history has bequeathed. But truly there is no other way.

# Chapter 2 The Arab Threat: The Israeli Perspective

#### Shmuel Limone\*

- 1. The Setting: The environment of conflict in which Israel finds itself has unique characteristics. Throughout most of its history as an independent nation, Israel has confronted and dealt with a heavily armed Arab world, professing various degrees of hostility toward it. The agreements with Egypt, the Palestinians and with Jordan, as well as the peace efforts now pursued between Israel and other Arab parties have not yet convinced all Arab and Moslem countries to recognize the right of a Jewish state to exist in their midst.
- 2. The Essence of the Threat: This unique international phenomenon the existence of a small nation within a large collective of mostly hostile states has long determined the nature of the confrontation and the psychological state of mind in which Israelis live. The Jewish people's painful history of persecution, coupled with the memory of the collective Arab opposition to the creation of the state of Israel, has instilled in many Israelis a sense of apprehension toward their Arab surrounding. Indeed, to many Israelis what still shapes their sense of security, is an uneasy feeling that at stake is not only Israel's territorial integrity or political freedom, but its very legitimacy as a Jewish state.
- 3. Mitigating Factors: This paper deals with the parameters of threat that make up Israel's security concerns. Still, it should be emphasized that the present political process which reflects a growing recognition among important Arab states of the futility of the use of force as a means to advance political goals has blunted the immediacy and weight of these concerns. Although the current political process has so far produced tangible progress mainly in the Palestinian and Jordanian tracks, it has nevertheless signalled a breakthrough

<sup>\*</sup> Shmuel Limone, Analyst, Israeli Ministry of Defense, Ramat-Gan, Israel.

also in the attitudes of other Arab countries toward Israel. It also stabilized the conflict and served as a vital learning experience for all.

- Israel's Reaction: In a broader historic context, Israel acknowledges the positive changes that have taken place in some key aspects of its "traditional" threats. Consequently, it has been willing to assume greater political and security risks in order to achieve peace with its neighbours. Recent political developments support this claim. Israel has entered into an open ended process of negotiations with the Palestinians, and has already transferred a significant number of powers and responsibilities - including in the sphere of security - to the Palestinian Authority. It has demonstrated its readiness to institute and abide by a new, less complex, security regime along its border with Jordan. It has also restated its understanding that peace with Syria cannot be achieved without an Israeli return of Golan territory to Syrian hands.
- Basic Asymmetries: The strategic setting, or, more correctly, the general state of threat in which Israel exists and operates, reflects some basic asymmetries that exist between Arabs and Israel. Most of these factors can be presumed to remain permanent features of the overall Arab-Israeli balance of power:
  - a. First, except for its coastline, Israel is completely surrounded by Arab states. Their large territories provide a militarily important strategic hinterland. Israel is small in size and has no strategic depth.
  - b. Second, Israel is dependent on outside sources of energy, and on sea and air lines for communication.
  - c. Third, the Arab world as a whole possesses vast oil reserves and hence, assured financial resources. Israel lacks in natural resources, including water.
  - d. Fourth, the density of its population and industrial centers makes Israel vulnerable to attacks. Israel is extremely sensitive to casualties among its general population and its citizen-soldiers, a point well understood and exploited by those who wish to harm it.
  - e. Fifth, Israel is incapable of sustaining a long, drawn-out war because of constraints such as the levels of inventory, time and space, and political

considerations. The Israeli army relies mainly on reserve forces whose mobilization and deployment consume critical time. In the past this in-built asymmetry has increased the temptation to rely on surprise, or to resort to a war of attrition in order to maximize the Arab advantage.

- f. Sixth, Israel is clearly outnumbered, and maintaining a military balance strains its economy and its available manpower pool. The Arab superiority in number also provides an advantage in potential capabilities. True, Modernization of Arab societies proceeds at a slow pace. Yet, a concerted effort, focused on selected areas, can add and indeed, has added an ominous dimension to some Arab military capabilities.
- g. Seventh, many Arabs, and in a wider sense, Moslem countries, have been able to enlist religious considerations and arguments in their effort to isolate Israel. The rise and spread of Islamic fundamentalism, with its virulent anti-Israeli ideology, has exacerbated the religious dimension of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It has also created a new, indirect threat to Israel, in the form of radical Islamic subversion against those regimes and organizations seeking accommodation with Israel. In the long run, this phenomenon may pose the most severe threat to Israel and to the cause of peace in the Middle East in general.
- h. *Eighth*, while many Arab and Moslem countries are ruled by autocratic regimes (monarchic, dictatorial or fundamentalist), Israel is an open democracy, easily observed from the outside. Major decisions in Israel are usually crystallized after a public, often critical debate, and then approved by a majority of a democratically elected legislature. In some Arab countries similar decisions may not reflect such widespread popular consent, and hence may be more amenable to sudden changes. That disparity increases Israel's sense of vulnerability.
- 6. The Historical Record: An analysis of Israel's approach to its Mideastern environment must, first and foremost, consider the essence of its experience with the Arab countries surrounding it. For years, Israel and the Arab states have been locked in a situation of ongoing conflict. The radical Arab states and movements have considered themselves as being in a state of war with Israel. To them, and in particular to those Arabs and to Iran that actively oppose any conciliation with Israel, a decision to initiate active hostilities

needed not be predicated on any peculiar grievance or dispute with Israel. In their view, the very establishment of Israel was in itself an act of aggression and hence the use of force against it - a legitimate course of action to ensure Arab and Moslem rights. In the more extremist version of this ideology, this option has remained the only course of action. The upshot of this was that threats of war and violence have for years remained a permanent given in Israeli fears and expectations.

- What Has Changed: Although not renounced by all in the Arab and in the Moslem world, this line of thinking has undergone significant changes. The net effect of these changes on the Israeli public opinion has been positive: the majority of Israelis no longer view war as an almost inevitable consequence of their existence, and consider peace in the Middle East as a plausible possibility.
- What Remained The Same: Even so, this change in perception has not swept all segments of the Israeli society, nor has it necessarily remained constant among those who share these perceptions. The prevailing consensus in Israel attributes Arab acceptance of its existence as an independent, non-Arab state in the area, as an expression of realpolitik; that is to say, as an admission of Israel's strength, vitality and determination, not as an acknowledgement of a moral imperative. Thus, even those who place greater faith in Arab intentions, reserve their judgement as to the irreversibility of the changes in Arab attitudes toward Israel. They, too, demand that the perceived changes in these attitudes be buttressed by tangible reassurances. They, too, seek concrete evidence that Arab intentions reflect more than just transient or utilitarian considerations.
- Types of Threats: Following is a summation of threats which, even if not imminent, are perceived in Israel as real. As such, they are reflected in Israel's defence policy and its force structure:
  - a. Existential Threats: Weapons of mass destruction threaten the very existence of the state and its people, especially in view of the territorial and demographic asymmetries mentioned before. To Israelis, that has meant that Israel could not afford to lose a single major war. It also prescribed the employment of offensive tactics to preempt perceived imminent attacks.

- b. Attritional Threats: The same asymmetries do not allow engagement in a lengthy war of attrition. Israel must thus possess the capacity for an early victory.
- c. *Strategic Surprise*: The need for mobilization of its reserves makes Israel vulnerable to a surprise attack. Thus, early warning and strategic intelligence are vitally important.
- d. Threats Against Population Centers: A few major cities comprise a significant share of the population, making even conventional strikes an intolerable threat. Here too, prime emphasis must be put on deterrence.
- e. War On Several Fronts: Threatened by more than one state, Israel must consequently maintain a balance of power with a coalition of adversaries and not just with any one of its members.
- f. Terrorism: In addition to high-intensity warfare, Israel has had to contend with almost uninterrupted attempts to disrupt the daily life of its population, undermine its resolve and hurt its economy - all through the use of terror. Terrorism has assumed many forms: infiltration, sporadic shelling across the borders, hostage taking, indiscriminate sabotage, hijacking, and other kinds of small scale warfare. In the past, certain groups considered terror as a preferred mechanism with which to trigger a desirable chain reaction of strikes and counter strikes that would precipitate an all out military confrontation with Israel. This type of rationale no longer holds true today. Still, in view of the prevailing division in the Israeli society and of the public mood, the use of terror tactics does carriy with it strategic implications. It adversely affects the Government's ability to adopt flexible negotiating positions in an atmosphere of violence and threats to personal security. At any rate, while Israel sees itself responsible for combatting internally generated terrorism, it has consistently held other countries responsible for activities stemming from their territory.
- g. Internal Threats: Lastly, Israel must also contend with Jewish extremists who may choose, through the use of violence, to subvert the political agenda currently pursued by the Israeli government. Such extremists, operating on the fringes of the Israeli society in defiance of the law and public opinion, are

nonetheless capable of posing a threat to the movement towards peace and accommodation, especially between Israelis and Palestinians.

- 10. Economic and Political Threats: Missing from this list of threats are two additional factors: economic and political threats. Both have not entirely disappeared. Officially, Arab economic boycott against Israel still remains in effect. Also, traditional anti-Israeli drafts are still routinely circulated in international organizations. However, both types of threats have lost much of their vigor and efficacy. The secondary economic boycott has been renounced by important Arab countries and there is a decrease in the hitherto routine resort to anti-Israeli rhetoric even in international fora.
- 11. Future Prospects: To sum up the current efforts to achieve a peaceful settlement between Israel and its surrounding Arab states carry a potential for movement and change. Should they succeed, they stand to produce the possibility of a far reaching, positive transformation in the political-military climate in the Middle East and in the Israeli perception of external threats. Strategic peace dividends such as stability, predictability and shared interests may not be such far fetched ideas in this possibly new evolving reality.
- 12. Future Risks: Still, even such conditions will need a relatively long period to adjust and to ripen, and will not necessarily eliminate other, even existential, threats to Israel. Positive developments may even induce fundamentalists to further increase their attempts of undermining the process of conciliation between Arabs and Israelis. Radical Islamic elements will therefore continue to play a crucial, and from Israel's point of view, extremely dangerous role in the political environment affecting Israel's security in years to come. As already mentioned, this state of affairs holds true in regard to threats of terror against Israelis and Jews. However, it also holds true in regard to indirect threats against those Arab regimes which have opted to settle their differences with Israel through a diplomatic dialogue.
- 13. Need for Vigilance: In the long run, even in a positive negotiating climate, and under conditions of an expanding peace, risks to Israel's security will not disappear. In the absence of mutual arms control agreements, and as long as some Moslem regimes remain loath to Israel's very existence, such risks will continue to persist.

# Chapter 3 From Geopolitics to Geo-Economics Egyptian National Security Perceptions

Abdel Monem Said Aly\*

#### 3.1 Introduction

The major objective of this paper is to illustrate that Egyptian national security perceptions since the mid-1970s have been undergoing major transformations. These changes lie in the shift from geopolitical security concerns to geo-economic ones. Geopolitics here are understood as the traditional national security threats which emanate from the geography, as well as from the history of the nation state. The safeguard of the nation's survival and the protection of its territorial integrity are the main objectives of a nation's security policy. Power politics and the balance of powers are the means to achieve these objectives. The concept of geo-economics, on the other hand, is much more complex. The subjects of external threats are, according to this concept, not the survival of the state and of its territorial integrity, but the state's economic well-being, its social cohesion and ability to withstand economic competition. The means to protect national security in geo-economic terms are the increase of productivity, economic reforms, the integration of regional and international markets and the protection of income sources. Security of the sources of the integration of regional and international markets and the protection of income sources.

This paper is going to present the argument according to which Egyptian national security perceptions are undergoing a fundamental change: from the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> B.A. Most and H. Starr, "Polarity, Preponderance and Power Parity in the Generation of International Conflict", *International Interactions*, January 1987, pp. 255-266; J.L. Gaddis, *The Long Peace*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1987; M. Midlarsky, "A Hierarchical Equilibrium Theory of Systemic War", *International Studies Quarterly*, January 1986, pp. 77-105; and J.S. Levy, "The Polarity of the System and International Stability", in A.S. Sabrosky (ed.), *Polarity and War*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985, pp. 41-66.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> R.O. Keohane and J.S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1977.

traditional geopolitical national security perspective to the more complicated geoeconomic perspective. However, this argument does not imply that geopolitical concerns have disappeared from Egyptian national security calculations. On the contrary, Egyptian security policy will continue to be influenced by traditional geopolitical considerations.

### 3.2 Geopolitics: The Past

Geography, as well as history, have to a large extent determined Egypt's national security problems.

Egypt is situated at the South-Eastern corner of the Mediterranean Sea, at the crossroads between the three continents of the old world, and at the end point of the River Nile's long journey from the heart of Africa. Egyptian security has become sensitive to the moves and capabilities of external powers.<sup>3</sup>

One of the main features of the Egyptian history is the unbroken unity of its country. Egypt has known the phenomenon of statesood for about six millennia. Not the same can be said, however, of the independence of its politics. Ever since the Persian conquest in 525 BC, foreign domination has been a marked feature in Egyptian history. In more recent modern times, Egyptian nationhood developed in a context of conflict with external powers. Thus, both geographical and historical considerations have defined the "constants" of the Egyptian perception of national security.

First, unlike most Third World countries, Egyptian autonomy and statehood-more or less within the present boundaries - created a perception of the minimum security needs, in the face of the external threats faced by the country. These perceptions have further been enhanced by the nation-state building process which started in 1805, and by the creation of the first Egyptian "national army".

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Gamal Hamdan, Egypt's Character, Cairo: Dar Al-Hilal, 1968; and M.H. Haykal, The Suez Files: The Thirty Years War, Cairo: Al-Ahram, 1986, in Arabic.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Charles Issawi, Egypt At Mid-Century, An Economic Survey, London: Oxford University Press, 1954.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Christina P. Harris, *Nationalism and Revolution in Egypt*, The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1954; Nadav Safran, *Egypt in Search of Political Community*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961; Mohamed Heikal, "Egyptian Foreign Policy", *Foreign Affairs*, July 1978; and Abdel Monem Said Aly, *Nation State and Transitional Society*, paper represented at the Conference on "Dynamics of States and Societies in the Middle East", Cairo University, 17-19 June 1989.

Second, a long history of foreign domination defined the "fronts" which the Egyptians have had to defend: the Macedonians came from the North, over the Mediterranean, so did the Romans, the Crusaders, and later the French and the British colonizing forces; the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Byzantines, the Arabs, the Turks and finally the Israelis, marched towards the Nile Valley from the North-East, over the African-Asian land bridge. The legacy of this foreign domination has moulded the fears of Egyptian security policy.

In contemporary terms, the threats to Egyptian national security have been defined in terms of the fear of Western domination. The Egyptian struggle against British colonialism and US hegemony - operating under the disguise of the Baghdad Pact or the Eisenhower Doctrine-, have long been the main features of Egyptian security policy. Even more importantly, the creation, with Western support, of the state of Israel in 1948 constituted a major security threat to Egypt. Egypt fought Israel in 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973. The fact that Israel was created on the basis of a biblical notion of history influenced significantly policies in the West. The fact that until very recently Israel did not have any defined borders also made up for the Egyptian sense of insecurity.

Third, since Egypt's very existence depends on the water of the Nile, the first concern for any Egyptian government has been to guarantee that these waters would not be threatened. As J. Waterbury stated "No other major river valley is shared by so many autonomous actors and no other downstream state is utterly dependent for its livelihood as Egypt is upon its river". Terefore, the imperative is to ensure that no hostile power will be allowed to control the headwaters of the Nile, or to tamper with Egypt. However, owing to a combination of political conditions and technological limitations in Central and Eastern Africa, this threat fortunately did not materialize for a long time.

# 3.3 Geopolitics: The Present

The Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty of 1979, and the current peace process in the Middle East - which produced the Palestinian-Israeli and the Jordanian-Israeli agreements in 1993 and 1994 - have considerably reduced the Israeli security threat to Egypt. The Peace Treaty not only defined the Egyptian-Israeli borders and reduced the possibility of an Israeli surprise attack, but also brought Egypt

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> John Waterbury, Hydropolitics of the Nile Valley, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1979, p. 63.

closer to the US. The US has hence become the guarantor of a peaceful and secure Egyptian-Israeli relation. However, the Peace Treaty has not brought an end to the Egyptian fears regarding Israel. These fears continue, based on considerations of political as well as of military nature.

Politically, Israel continues to have a fanatic and fundamentalist right wing supported by about one third of the Israeli public. Not only does this right wing consider the Israeli position in the Middle East in biblical terms, but it also emphasizes the fears and the suspicions concerning Egyptian and Arab positions toward Israel. Military superiority and the use of the armed forces are, according to the right wing, the first means for achieving Israel's political objectives. Since the Peace Treaty has imposed various military constraints on the Sinai Peninsula, the security of Sinai has become hostage to any Israeli change of mind.

More importantly, from a military point of view, Israel has secured itself a position of superiority in conventional and non-conventional weapons. Israel, supported by the US, has emphasized the need for its qualitative superiority not only against Egypt, but against the entire Arab world. Israel has become capable of producing a wide range of advanced weapon systems in addition to its imports of highly sophisticated ones. In fact, several tactics and technologies which resulted from the US-Israeli defence relations are now being used by the US and by other Western armies. For example, the use today by the US of electronic warfare during preemptive assaults is largely rooted in the Israeli tactic during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. It is clear though that this type of reciprocal Israeli-US technological defence co-operation is completely different from US-Egyptian cooperation. While the US was able to obtain combat proven data and innovative technologies from Israel, in order to develop its military items, Israel received enough equipment, funds and know-how to develop its own advanced fighter LAVI (the project was then cancelled at an advanced stage), its own modern MBT tank - the MERKAVA -, and a host of advanced missiles, including the Jericho strategic missile, the BARAK anti-missile, and the upcoming ARROW ABM system.8

Beside benefitting from the technological co-operation, Israel succeeded in obtaining all the key assets of the US conventional arsenal. Currently, Israel's air

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, After the Palestinian-Israeli agreement, The Israeli Public Option, March 1994.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> "The Lessons of Combat: Israel's R&D Center", *Military Technology*, June 1991, pp. 51-53; and Steven M. Shaker and Howard B. Shaker, "Israeli Weapons Technology and the US Military", *National Defence*, March 1986, p. 38.

assets include the F-16, the F-15 EAGLE, the F-4 PHANTOM II, the E-2c HAWKEYE, the C-130 HERCULES, the Boeing 707, the AH-1 and the COBRA HELICOPTERS and AH-64 APACHEs and 20 BLACKHAWKs. It is likely that Israel chose to consider adding the F/A-18 to its multi-role inventory, because of an expansion in tactical requirements. According to Israeli air force planners, Israel might be called in the future to deploy multi role aircraft against targets demanding deeper penetration and higher altitudes, for which the F/A-18 is uniquely suited. A clear preference was also expressed by the Israeli fighter pilots in favor of replacing their McDonnel-Douglas F-15 EAGLEs with the new Lockheed F-22 Advanced Tactical Fighter (ATF). However, it seems that the Israeli government will not be able to afford the cost of the \$100 million F-22, unless the United States drastically boosts its military aid to Israel.

At present, Israel is planning on deploying around five PATRIOT batteries before the mid-1990s. The ARROW missile system would, by the year 2000, provide Israel with roughly three times the ABM range, and a higher altitude than that provided by the PATRIOT. The ARROW experiments conducted by US and Israeli technicians will contribute in the future to establishing the larger ABM technology base necessary for the building of regional and theatre ABM networks.

The US air-to-ground AGM-144 HAVE NAP missile is basically identical to the Israeli POPEYE missile for which the US offered around \$33.6 millions to obtain 32 systems. Israel built its reputation developing and producing the UAV (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles), and has already concluded contracts with the USN, USMC, US army to provide them with several systems.

Israel is now developing and producing the POPEYE (stand-off precision guided air-to-ground) missiles, the PYTHON III (short range air-to-air) missiles, BARAK (anti-sea skimmers) and ADAMS point defence missile interceptors, as well as a wide range of advanced electronic warfare systems and reactive armour suits for armour (BLAZER). Israel is listed among the few countries capable of producing a first line quality tank; MERKAVA was developed to ensure Israel a tank available regardless of the state of world politics. <sup>10</sup>

The current growth of the Israeli naval power is aiming at deploying more capable upper class missile FACs, high performance submarines, and sea based long range ballistic and cruise missiles supported by a satellite surveillance

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Tim Ripley, "Israel's Pilots look to the Future", *International Defence Review*, March 1922, p. 261; and Marvin Leibatone, "US-Middle East Defence Cooperation", *Military Technology*, October 1991, p. 66.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

network. Israel has increased its ship point defence capabilities against aircraft and missile attacks including sea skimmers by using the BARAK missile system. The unmanned helicopter HELLSTAR developed by IAI will soon be delivered to the Israeli navy, thus making Israel the first country to be operating such type of vehicles. <sup>11</sup>

An Israeli naval expansion program has called recently for two attack submarines DOLPHIN-class and three SAAR 5 missile corvettes. The DOLPHIN submarines will clearly be superior by far to what the Arab navies possess today. These new built submarines are expected to carry long range missiles. Operationally, this means the extension of the Israeli theatre of action and targeting capabilities.

In addition to the Israeli qualitative edge over its adversaries in conventional weapons, Israel has developed absolute superiority in two areas. First, Israel introduced in the 1980s the space arms race to the Middle East. The launching of the Israeli satellite "Ofeg-1" on 19 September 1988 and of "Ofeg-2" on 2 April 1990, started a new era in the technological race in the Middle East. <sup>12</sup> Israel is, at least according to the Egyptian perception, developing its space assets to enhance the use of its conventional and unconventional machine through spying, jamming, reconnaissance, command, control, and battle management. There is no Egyptian nor Arab program comparable to the Israeli one in space.

Second, contrarily to the conventional race which covers most of the Middle East, the nuclear race is almost entirely one-sided. Most experts on the subject agree that Israel not only possesses a nuclear capability, but also nuclear warheads as well as their delivery systems. With the destruction of the Iraqi nuclear program during and after the Gulf War, the Arab world virtually has no nuclear capability. In spite of all the predictions made in the 1970s, according to which Libya and Iran would have a nuclear bomb by 1985; and Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, and Syria by 1990; and in spite of the prediction that Egypt, Iraq and Libya would be small nuclear powers before the end of the twentieth century, the reality has proved to be quite different. With the exception of small research reactors in Libya, Egypt and Iraq, the Arab world has no nuclear capability. <sup>13</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Israel Leshem, "Current Israel Naval Program: A Status Report", *Military Technology*, October 1990, pp. 79-98.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> The Jerusalem Post, 20 September 1987.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Paul Jabber, Israel and Nuclear Weapons, London: Chatto and Windus, 1972; Paul Jabber, A Nuclear Middle East: Infrastructure, Likely Posture and Prospects for Strategic Stability, Los Angeles: Center for Arms Control and International Security, 1977; Yair Evron, "Israel and the

If the Israeli arm racing continues to jeopardize the stability created by the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty on the Egyptian North-Eastern front; multilateral negotiations on regional security and arms control in the Middle East are expected - even if they extend over a continued period of time- to reduce the Egyptian fears of a military imbalance with Israel. On the Southern front, however, there is more than one reason for an increase of the sense of insecurity. During the past two decades, the internal instability of the states situated in the Nile Basin particularly Ethiopia and Sudan -, as well as the regional rivalries among those states have intensified the Egyptian perception of a real security threat. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Sudan has affected not only Egyptian territorial integrity, but also its internal stability. The Islamic government of Sudan has persistently questioned Egyptian sovereignty over the Hallaib strip in the South-Eastern corner of Egypt, and offered assistance, and sometimes even declared support to Islamic radicals in Egypt. These facts - compounded by the sharp decline in the water level of the Nile throughout the 1980s, as a result of climatic and economic developments - have also heightened the Egyptian perception of insecurity.

# 3.4 Geo-Economics: The Gulf

In addition to these traditional geopolitical "constants" in Egypt's national security concerns, a new security dimension for Egypt arose in the 1970s and 1980s. The growing Egyptian-Gulf interdependence made the stability of the Gulf region an Egyptian national security interest. The well-known phenomenon of labour migration to the Arab oil-producing countries provided extensive employment opportunities, as well as capital to the Egyptian government and individuals. According to conservative estimates for the period from 1974 to 1984, 3.3 million Egyptians migrated to work in the Arab oil-producing countries. They transferred to Egypt \$33 billion in cash transfers, deposits in banking, goods and commodities. This sum represented almost three times the amount of the

Atom: The Uses and Misuses of Ambiguity, 1957-1967", Orbis 17, Winter 1974, 1326-45; Shlomo Aronson, Israel Nuclear Option, Los Angeles: Center for Arms Control and International Security, 1977; Leonard S. Spector, Going Nuclear, Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Publishing Co., 1987; Louis R. Beres (ed.), Security of Armageddon: Israel's Nuclear Strategy, Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1986; Mark Gaggney, "Prisoners of Fear: A Retrospective of the Israeli Nuclear Program", American Arab Affairs, Fall 1987, 75-96; and "Revealed: The Secrets of Israel's Nuclear Arsenal", Sunday Times, London, 5 October 1986.

American economic aid to Egypt over the same period. The following years showed that remittances seemed to continue the same average. In 1985/86, they amounted to \$3,063, \$3,012 for 1986/87, \$3,387 for 1987/88, \$3,522 for 1988/1989, \$3,743 for 1989/1990, \$3,775 for 1990/1991. The total for 1974-1993 reached \$72 billion.<sup>14</sup>

Remittances have not been the only source of income transferred to Egypt from its Arab-Gulf connection. In 1982, 613,000 Arab tourists visited Egypt, accounting for 43.41% of the total number of tourists. By 1992, the number of Arab tourists had almost doubled to reach 1.1 million or about 34% of the total. The Arab share in Egyptian tourism is significant not only because of the number of tourists, but also because they tend to stay longer and spend more than European and American tourists might. The increase in the Suez-Canal revenues over the past two decades was largely due to the growth in the Arab-Gulf economies. Arab journalism, broadcasting, and television were dependent on Egyptians working in Egypt. Egyptian private sector hospitals were preferred by the middle income groups in the Arab oil producing countries. Egypt continued to occupy the first position, as a country of the region, as far as Arab investments were concerned. In mid-1994, the Arab share of investments represented 20% (EL 25,145 million) of the total private investment and 49% (EL 10,373 million) of the total foreign investment. These investments mostly originate from the Gulf. 15

The economic dimension of national security has become more evident since Egypt has had to face a growing economic crisis. The security and stability of the Gulf region have become vital to the Egyptian national interest. The Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 and the Iran-Iraq war - two years later - have threatened this interest. Throughout the 1980s, Iran was considered the sole destabilizing state in the Gulfarea, and hence a threat to Egyptian national security. Consequently, even under President Sadat, Egypt did not hesitate to stand behind Iraq in the conflict, both militarily and economically.

As a result of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990, the scope of Egyptian security interests in the Gulf became wider. The security interest became more than simply aiming at curbing Iran. During and after the Gulf crisis and war, Egypt played a leading rule in the process that led to the defeat of Iraq and the liberation of Kuwait. The Egyptian denunciation of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Calculated from annual reports of the Egyptian Central Bank and IMF reports on the Egyptian economy. "Egyptian National Bank", The Economic Bulletin, No 4, 1993, p. 393.

was strong and immediate. Egypt orchestrated through an Arab Summit in Cairo on 10 August 1990, an Arab coalition to participate in the international effort to liberate Kuwait. Egypt contributed to Operation Desert Storm, to the 4th Armoured Division, to the 3rd Mechanized Division, and to the 20th Special Forces Regiment (Totalled 35,000) - all of which played a key role in the attack into Kuwait. Further, Egypt contributed considerable intelligence and logistical support to the allied war efforts. Also, Cairo became a center for Kuwaiti exiles. Thanks to the Egyptian government support, Kuwait television, radio, and print media were able to continue reporting on the crisis from Cairo to the Kuwaiti citizens throughout the Middle East and Europe. <sup>16</sup> The first and the second Gulf wars proved the influence of geo-economic considerations in the Egyptian security policy.

#### 3.5 Geo-Economics: Islamic Fundamentalism

The coming to power of Ayatollah Ruhallah Khomini in Iran in February 1979, the seizure of the Grand Mosque Al-Kabba in Mecca in November 1979, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan of the same year and the subsequent "Islamic resistance" to it, as well as the assassination of the Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat in October 1981 introduced the phenomenon of Islamic fundamentalism to world politics. By the 1990s, the phenomenon had become widespread in most Islamic countries, and some of its impacts had even reached Europe and the United States.

Scholars of the Islamic phenomenon in Egypt, and in the rest of the Islamic world have identified several causes for the rise of fundamentalism, particularly of its most radical manifestations.

First, Islamic radicalism appears to be an Islamic response to the shock provoked by Westernization and modernization. Religious response thus offered the salvation and psychological balance needed by Islamic countries who were being exposed to modern day material life. This is especially the case where, over the past few decades, modernization has taken place as an accelerated process. Iran is usually the case in point. Similar features appear in Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria. Contrary to these cases, Islamic radicalism and violence could be reduced to a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> US Department of Defence, Conduct of the Persian Gulf War: Final Report to Congress, April 1992; and House Armed Services Committee, Defence for a New Era: Lessons of the Persian Gulf War, US Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., 1992.

minimum in countries where the state identified itself with Islam or with the religious institutions - as was the case in Saudi Arabia and Morocco.

Second, socio-economic factors like unemployment, inflation and corruption are seen to be influential in intensifying religious feelings and tendencies toward extremism. As the masses find themselves confronted with increasing social disparities and economic hardship, they resort to Islam. The various ways in which they resort to Islam may go as far as including the possibility of the use of violence to correct social and economic imbalance. Evidence of this argument could be seen in Egypt, Pakistan, Algeria, Tunisia, and Sudan. Contrary to these cases, where economic development has taken leaps forward, such as in Indonesia and Malaysia, Islamic fundamentalism is considerably contained.

Third, Islamic fundamentalism is a response to the crisis of identity in the Islamic countries. Since state nationalism appears unable to meet the internal problems of development and the external problems of security threats, Islamic nationalism comes to the fore to rescue Muslims from both the failing national elites and the foreign intruders. It has been argued repeatedly that the failure of Arab nationalism in combating Zionism in Palestine has been a major factor behind the rise of Islamic radicalism in the Arab world. The rise of the Islamic fundamentalist organization, Hamas, in the Occupied Palestinian Territories was considered a response to the failure of the nationalist and the secularist PLO to achieve the Palestinian national goals. Apparently, the Israeli recognition of the PLO is an attempt to reverse this trend. In some cases Islam appears to be the only identity able to meet the aspirations of peoples who have been deprived for too long from developing their national identities. This also holds true for the ex-Soviet central Asian republics.

In Egypt, Islamic fundamentalism dates back to 1927, when the movement of the Muslim Brotherhood was created. Most of the Islamic movements of the present time have come from the garb of the Muslim Brotherhood. Although the Brotherhood went through significant changes towards moderation, more radical and violent groups have appeared and represent a significant force in the politics of the Islamic world. Political groups in Egypt have in the course of the last two decades frequently and systematically - in the name of Islam - made use of terrorism. The Islamic Liberation Party, the Society of Muslims, Al-Takfir wa al-Higra (Repentance and Migration), Al-Jihad (The Holy War), and Al-Najon Min Al-Nar (Those Saved From Hell), in addition to more than thirty other small groups, have carried out violent acts not only against politicians, but against the Egyptian society as a whole. They have marked Egyptian history through events such as the Military Technical College incident in 1974, the assassination of

Sheikh Mohamad al- Dhahabi, the former Minister of Religious Endowment in 1977, and the assassination of President Sadat in 1981. In 1987 they attempted the assassination of former Interior Ministers Hassan Abu Basha and Nabawi Ismail and that of the Editor in Chief of Al-Musswar magazine, Makram Mohamed Ahmad. By 1988, they were attacking everything they considered immoral in music and arts, and even university parties and wedding parties in Egyptian villages (particularly in the provinces of Upper Egypt).

Since the summer of 1992, the level of terrorism has reached new heights. Early in the summer, the liberal political writer Farag Foda was assassinated. By the end of the summer, these terrorist groups were violently attacking Egyptian Christians in some villages of Upper Egypt. In the fall, they went further to target tourists in order to seriously damage the Egyptian economy. By the winter of 1993, they exploded bombs indiscriminately in heavily populated areas. This was followed by two failed assassination attempts against Safwat al-Shrief, Minister of Information, and Hassan al-Alfi, Minister of Interior. Early 1994, they attempted to assassinate Atif Sidqi, the Prime Minister.<sup>17</sup>

In the remaining months of 1994, Islamic radicalism was sharply reduced. It has, however, remained a threat to the socio-economic fabric of Egypt. Moreover, Islamic radicalism is considered today a national security threat to Egypt. As early as in 1979, Defence Minister Kamal Hassan Ali stated that "the political and military goal of Egypt [was] to preserve the independence of Egypt, its territorial integrity, and [to]protect constitutional legitimacy". In October 1994, Defence Minister Mohammed Tantawy said that "the phenomenon of extremism is a challenge to Egypt's security and stability". "We in the armed forces are following up this phenomenon, and as the last line of defence against internal threats and as a part of the part of the Egyptian texture, we cannot stay away from any threat to that texture. We hope that matters will not reach that end". In The protection of the constitutional legitimacy - as a goal for the national defence policy -, and the safeguard of the armed forces - as a line of defence against Islamic radicalism - reflect the upgrading of internal domestic troubles to the level of threats to the national security.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Ibn Khaldoun Center for Developmental Studies, The File on Extremism and Terrorism, 1994.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Quoted in Gehad Auda, "Strategic Dependency and Arms Acquisition: The case of Egypt", paper presented at the conference on *Conventional Arms Transfer*, The Canadian Institute for Peace and Security, Ottawa, 21-22 October 1987.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> An interview with Field Marchal Mohammed Tantawy, Egyptian Defense Minister, *AL-Akhbar*, 5 October 1994.

# 3.6 Geo-Economics: The Fear of the Future

In the last two decades, owing to its foreign and defence policy, Egypt has been able to benefit from significant political and economic returns. By making use of its geopolitical position, Egypt has become an influential international and regional actor. This is due to four factors: a) the Cold War; b) the Arab-Israeli conflict and the peace process; c) the security in the Gulf; and d) the crisis in the Horn of Africa. These factors have allowed Egypt to increase status and influence in the Arab World, in the Middle East, in Third World forums, and in the UN. In addition, Egypt succeeded in gaining a listening ear in the major world capitals.

Egypt has also benefited from considerably increased economic aid. The returns from the Arab-Gulf states have been outlined above. Between 1975 and 1992, the US contributed over \$18 billion in economic assistance, in addition to a much higher contribution in military aid.<sup>20</sup> Europe, Japan, and major industrialized countries have not been less generous to Egypt. The second Gulf War reduced the pressure on the Egyptian economy. The US cancelled Egypt's military debts (\$6.7 billion), the Gulf states cancelled all Egyptian debts (\$7.1 billion), and Egypt's foreign debts were reduced by 50 percent.

The above mentioned factors have faced considerable changes in the past four years. Not only has the Cold War come to an end, but world politics have also recognized the shift towards the primacy of economics and towards interdependence. Despite the fact that the Arab-Israeli conflict has not come to an end yet, the threat of war has been reduced considerably since the Palestinian and Jordanian agreements with Israel were concluded. The prospects for an Israeli peace with Syria and Lebanon are very realistic. More importantly: the current peace process resolves the political, territorial aspects of the conflict, as well as those relevant to the national security. The process also paves the road for normalization, for economic interdependence, and even for a Middle East common market. All these prospects emphasize the primacy of geo-economics over geopolitics. Gulf security has finally been settled in US hands. The last Gulf crisis due to the Iraqi troop deployment near the Kuwaiti borders attested that the US military action was responsible for deterring Iraq. The US achieved to end the crisis without the help from any of the other coalition partners - Egypt included. The "Damascus Declaration" - of which Egypt had hoped it might continue to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> US AID Annual Report, Cairo, 1993.

fulfill its role of protecting the Gulf security - did not materialize. Finally, since the end of the Cold War the crisis in the Horn of Africa has become irrelevant.

These fundamental international and regional transformations refer to a possible decline Egypt's regional and international status. As geo-economics are gaining the primacy over regional and world politics, Egypt's power capabilities become less obvious. All the economic indicators point towards the fact that Egypt is less able to compete on the regional and international markets. This reality was translated among Egyptian national security circles into a growing fear of the future. According to these circles, the Egyptian market will be dominated by foreign powers, moreover by Israel. It has even been claimed that Israel will achieve economically what it has failed to achieve militarily.

# 3.7 Conclusions: From Geopolitics to Geo-Economics

The above review of the Egyptian threat perceptions shows that, although geopolitical factors continue to have a bearing on Egyptian national security, geoeconomic factors are increasingly coming to the forefront. Egypt is finally coming to face its weak internal power elements, which had been for too long overshadowed by the state's geopolitical position and concerns. Therefore, economic - as well as political - reforms are not only essential to Egyptian welfare and progress, but also fundamental to the Egyptian national security.

# Chapter 4 Palestinian Threat Perceptions

Yezid Sayigh\*

# 4.1 Introductory Remarks

The Arab-Israeli conflict has undergone a profound change since the signing of the PLO-Israel Declaration of Principles in September 1993. Definitions of security threats and requirements have shifted perceptibly, as Israel and a growing number of Arab states have established direct contacts. The governments concerned have not yet reduced their provisions for military defence, but their needs will now be calculated in terms of guarding the peace with their neighbours, rather than in terms of preparing for war. Besides, the emerging security construct contains major political and economic components, as well as more traditional military ones.<sup>1</sup>

The situation is different in the Palestinian-Israeli context, however. First and foremost, the two sides have only entered into an interim arrangement, in which the terms of the end-result have not yet been defined, let alone agreed. Moreover, there is an immense asymmetry of power and other capabilities, unlike in any other bilateral Arab-Israeli strategic relationship. More specifically, the Palestinians enjoy neither political sovereignty nor territorial integrity. Therefore, their vulnerability to pressure is extremely high, and their ability to determine their own security requirements correspondingly low. The overlap of historic and territorial claims and the intermeshing of economies and infrastructure not only makes separation or resolution highly problematic, but also complicates security calculations immeasurably. In other words, the definition of security and threats becomes multi-faceted and interactive to a degree unprecedented in any other bilateral Arab-Israeli relationship.

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<sup>1</sup> The notion of security as an integral concept is developed in Yezid Sayigh, Confronting the 1990s: Security in the Developing Countries, London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, Adelphi Paper No 251, 1990.

Three further introductory remarks with respect to the Palestinians should be made, before addressing the subject of threat perceptions in detail. The first is that transitions are by their very nature unstable, and involve shifts in structures and processes. Instability is exacerbated, as long as the final objective has not been defined. Every move, therefore, takes the parties concerned (and their domestic public) into new, uncharted waters. It thus becomes inevitable that, when negotiations eventually start on the permanent status, each party will fight over the tiniest technical or material detail, in order to maximize its advantages. The situation lends itself to conflict, multi-layered "games", coercion, and even violence. Transition in and of itself heightens insecurity and threat perceptions. The resultant instability may therefore impede further steps towards a final peace settlement.

Secondly, at the same time, each step actually taken forward breaks an old taboo, or at least facilitates the contemplation of compromises, which were previously not only regarded as unacceptable, but also as unthinkable. Recognizing Israel and talking to the PLO are the most obvious examples. The possibility of more accommodating attitudes towards really contentious issues - the Palestinian statehood, border "adjustments", the status of Jerusalem, the "right of return" for refugees, the future of the settlements, water, and security - is here, however, even more relevant. This is not based on idealistic hope or on the expectation of changing psychological attitudes. Rather, it assumes that successful application of each practical measure or phase will demonstrate the ways to be found, in order indeed to reconcile conflicting political claims and security needs. Evidence of practicality encourages an "engineering approach" and a relaxation of ideological imperatives.

Thirdly, the Palestinians face two distinct courses: to seek their further aims and security through either narrower, "national" control, or via wider, multilateral or regional arrangements. They are the weaker party, whether in relation to Israel or to their Arab neighbours. Moreover, they will remain the weaker party, especially if a Palestinian-Jordanian confederation is not formed. In conceptualizing their security dilemma and defining their future requirements, the Palestinians will have to appreciate which framework for relations - bilateral or collective - will offer greater defensive (or even deterrent) capability. This, of course, means far more than *military* security. This also refers to the ability of determining the contractual and strategic context, within which the Palestinians can better balance or trade off the different components of their security and national goals in favour of the best overall package.

#### 4.2 General Definition of Threats

Palestinian literature, that systematically defines security issues and discusses the nature of threats and responses, is sorely scarce. There exists nonetheless a small body of writings on the subject. According to these, the overall Palestinian security dilemma clearly stems from an existential threat. The debate remains confined within a narrow circle of academics and practitioners. There have been, however, numerous, unstructured references by policy- and decision-makers and by various Palestinian parties to the core issues. This makes it possible to identify and analyze the key areas and sources of perceived threats.

The existential threat has been the issue most discussed and developed by Palestinians, and therefore requires least introduction here. Briefly, the perception emanates from the history of subjection to a British mandate contractually committed to the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine, of traumatic uprooting in 1948, and of subsequent dispersal, denial, and forcible subjugation by Israel and Arab host governments. The preservation of national identity and the physical continuity of the national community have been directly threatened. This has produced a powerful conviction that future existence can only be assured through the modalities of self-determination in a sovereign state.<sup>3</sup>

Specific issues, such as the extent of territory and setting of borders, gain special importance deriving from the overall aim of statehood. The return (or compensation) of the Palestinians, uprooted and exiled in 1948, or displaced in 1967, is just as fundamental to existential security. Asserting control over East-Jerusalem, as a national center and eventual capital, is equally central to the success of the national self-image and of the state-building "project". Measures

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Prominent examples are Khalil Shikaki, "Palestinian Security Needs and Concerns", draft paper presented to UNIDIR workshop, Malta, April 1994; Ahmad Khalidi, "A Palestinian Settlement: Towards a Palestinian National Security Doctrine", Israeli-Palestinian Peace Research Project Working Paper Series, Arab Studies Society, Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace, and the Institute for International Affairs, Jerusalem and Rome, 1992; Ahmad Khalidi, "Middle East Security: Arab Threat Perceptions, Peace and Stability", in Ahmad Khalidi and Yair Evron, Middle East Security: Two Views, Cambridge MA: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Occasional Paper Series, 1990; and Yezid Sayigh, "La sécurité de l'Etat palestinien", Politique Etrangère, Paris, No 4, Winter 1992, pp. 825-35. A discussion of areas of concern is by Sari Nuseibeh, in Mark Heller and Sari Nuseibeh, No Trumpets, No Drums: A Two-State Settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, New York: Hill and Wang, 1991.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> For an early discussion of the Palestinian state, see the pathbreaking article by Walid Khalidi, "Thinking the Unthinkable", Foreign Affairs, Vol. 56, No 4, July 1978.

undertaken by Israel (especially) creating contrary facts on the ground are therefore perceived as direct threats not only to the eventual terms of peace settlement, but also and more fundamentally, to Palestinian core values and to the historic enterprise of national revival.

The settling of (Jewish) Israeli citizens across the 1949-1967 armistice lines, or around East-Jerusalem, poses a threat at several levels. A foremost example of this threat is that the pattern of Israeli settlement deliberately isolates Palestinians in East-Jerusalem from those in West Bank, and further divides the West Bank in separate non contiguous pockets. National communities cannot exist without a clear and free continuity existing between the material and psychological dimensions. To impose separations on the Palestinians will turn them into "townships" along South African apartheid lines, and ultimately produce alienation and violence, directed both inwards and outwards. Severe imbalances in economic and security control only reinforce the perception that structural disadvantages in peace agreements will be actively used to increase Israeli gains and reduce Palestinian claims.

# 4.3 Specific Threat Perceptions

The discussion so far has blurred the time frame. In other words, the precise nature of the threats perceived on the Palestinian side will vary, as the peace process evolves. The way and urgency in which the historically-perceived existential threat may itself be regarded differently, now that the PLO and Israel have recognized each other and entered into the interim autonomy agreement. At the very least, additional, detailed threats will appear relating to specific aspects of each current phase of the process. The fact of transitionality will tend to produce new, unexpected threats, although it may also reveal previous fears to be unfounded or exaggerated.

The Palestinian writings mentioned in footnote 2 have already suggested a typology of threats and issue areas, and have referred to the distinctions between phases. Rather than repeating or summarizing that work, a categorization of the threats according to the main actors or interested parties (ie, the *perceivers*) currently on the Palestinian side might be more useful.

The Palestinian National Authority (PNA): The PNA is evidently the most eager party to attain its long-stated goal of Palestinian statehood. This is not because other Palestinian groups are less committed to this national objective. Rather, it

is because the PNA is the "pragmatic" wing of the PLO under Arafat. As such, it has associated the attainment of statehood with a particular policy, namely the Declaration of Principles and its subsequent agreements. The PNA stands to lose the most, if the process fails. Equally, it is the most directly threatened by Israeli measures which either undermine its credibility or impede the final objective. All unilateral Israeli moves, such as settlement expansion or separation of East-Jerusalem, threaten the PNA and the entire Palestinian community.

By much the same token, the PNA remains vulnerable to the risk that the next stage of the autonomy process might not come at all. This is a threat held over it by Israel, that uses its control over the timetable, not only to present the PNA with performance tests, but also to threaten it with the *reversibility* of previous steps. The PNA is in a double bind, moreover, since the Palestinian opposition can also threaten the timetable. With acts of violence, the opposition can trigger Israeli counter-measures or reticence which, in turn, deprive the PNA of credibility and popular support. Ironically, activity by armed Jewish settlers is another double-edged threat, since it threatens both the Palestinians individually and collectively, and also reveals the PNA's inability to impose an end to this particular problem.

The potential for a spiral of violence and for a triangular punitive relationship involving Israel, the PNA, and the Palestinian opposition places the PNA between a rock and a hard place. Ultimately, the PNA has little political control over the terms of peace or security relations with Israel. At the same time, the PNA lacks most of the material resources with which real "peace dividends" could be offered to its public, in the form of housing, jobs, and public services. Indeed, economic control in all its aspects, or the lack of it, in itself presents a distinct threat to the PNA. Israel's closing off the Occupied Territories (banning daily labourers) or its separating East-Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank (strangling businesses and services) are only the most blatant examples of the economic threat. There is a structural economic threat as well, namely the Israeli ability to use devices such as standards to prevent the marketing of Palestinian goods. These threats may not always be used purely "defensively", that is to prevent terrorist attacks, but also for plainly coercive purposes. The final result is the weakening of the PNA's ability to maintain political stability and to confront security threats in areas under its control.

The above is not meant to suggest that the PNA is a passive actor, solely a victim of the policies of others. To the contrary, the PNA actively contributes to its own security dilemma through the governance and the administration of its own affairs. Certain threats are only the product of the PNA's particular world

outlook, and might not apply for a different leadership. For example, any challenge to the highly personalized management style and concentrated power of Arafat is perceived as a threat, not only to himself but also, *ipso facto* to the broader aims he embodies. External pressures to induce a different approach to public administration, including manipulation of international assistance, are therefore interpreted as interferences intended to impede further Palestinian political aims. Similarly, any constraints on the freedom of Palestinian action, including the freedom to fashion an autonomous security policy, are seen as deliberately designed to prevent successful Palestinian performance. They thereby provide Israel with the pretext to stall the next stage of the autonomy process.

The Palestinian opposition: The above criticism of the PNA suggests looking at the threat perceptions among the Palestinian opposition. The opposition groups with a tangible presence inside the Occupied Territories, in particular (as distinct from those operating primarily in Damascus), fear being excluded by the PNA from central Palestinian politics. They are of course most concerned by the threats posed by Israel, or other parties, to the long-term national objectives and core values, such as statehood, refugee rights, and the stake in Jerusalem. In the interim, however, the opposition faces the immediate problem of securing its right to operate politically within the autonomous areas. It fears that the PNA will proscribe this right, to keep it for own reasons, and even to use it in collaboration with Israel and outside powers, such as the US. A corollary fear is to be prevented from having any role or staking a share in the construction of the emerging economic system, public administration, and social management. It should be noted, at the same time, that other sections of the Palestinian population may in turn feel threatened by the opposition. An obvious example is the threat posed by the social policies promoted by the Islamists.

The diaspora: A major category of Palestinians, who have been all but written out of the peace script so far, are those living in exile, outside the boundaries of what Palestine used to be until 1948. The threats faced by the Palestinian community in Lebanon are the most obvious: sustained violence and brutalization in the past, and now a systematic government policy (containing both formal, explicit and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> One of the rare references to diaspora insecurity is in Ann Mosely Lesch (principal author), *Transition to Palestinian Self-Government: Practical Steps Toward Israel-Palestinian Peace*, Report of a Study Group Convened by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, published in collaboration with Indiana University Press, 1992, Chapter Two.

informal, implicit elements) designed to promote emigration. The general approach of the global powers (not to mention Israel) implicitly seeks ways of resettling a majority of refugees in Arab states (with Northeastern Syria and Iraq occasionally mooted). This is not likely to become a peaceful process, given the critical social and economic conditions of most prospective hosts.

Palestinians in Jordan are far more secure, but are increasingly presented with conflicting pulls on their identity and competing demands on their political allegiance. The state of the Jordanian-PNA relations has always been of importance; in the long-term, each of the policy options of confederation, merger under Jordanian rule, or separation and statehood threatens to provoke the fears among the native Jordanian population, and to revive latent tensions between the two communities.

The prospect for Palestinians in the diaspora is therefore increasingly insecure. This will eventually have a growing influence on relations and negotiations between Israel and the PNA. Throughout, the PNA is vulnerable to the risk that diaspora-based Palestinians may work actively against it, or against the autonomy arrangements, thereby threatening the transition to subsequent stages. Alternatively, its attempt to shoulder its responsibilities towards the refugees of 1948 and 1967 may put it onto a collision course with the Arab hosts or with Israel. This would significantly add to the material burden of providing housing, welfare, and jobs to returnees who join the Palestinian entity. At the very least, the fate of the refugees will figure prominently in the permanent status negotiations between the PNA and Israel, and may provide the latter with additional means of pressure against the former.

# 4.4 Sources and Types of Threat

Three main sources of threats have been mentioned so far: Israel, Palestinian groups, and outside parties (including Arab governments or parties). The general assumption that any of these parties would indeed pose a threat needs substantiation and discussion.

Israel: Palestinians historically perceive Israel as the single most threatening actor. Its threat is the longest standing, going back to the turn of the century (in the form of Jewish immigration, land purchases, and Zionism), and operates on the largest number of levels. The Palestinians still live with the consequences of the "catastrophe" of 1948, as they call it, and of the Arab defeat in June 1967. Even

after the Oslo Accord, Israel remained in control of the entire territory of mandate Palestine, and retained the decisive say in all aspects of Palestinian life within those borders.

A number of the ways, in which Israel is perceived as a threat by the Palestinians, have already been described above. Non-military issues have been highlighted. Most important to reiterate here is Israel's *structural* dominance, through which Palestinian policy and behaviour can be contained, impeded, or directed in any functional sphere: be it security, economic, legal, infrastructural, or overtly political. Such control may be seen as a necessary defensive precaution on the Israeli side, and does not have to be threatening to the Palestinians. However, the "grey area" is important and allows considerable room for cynical exploitation or mismanagement. Even with the best will in the world, the requirements of security, as interpreted by the Israeli government, may be fundamentally destabilizing for the PNA. Border closures and labour bans, in response to terrorist attacks, are the most obvious examples. It becomes apparent in this context that, whatever impact the PNA might have on the process, through better or poorer management of its own affairs, resources, and opportunities, Israel retains the decisive influence in all cases.

Palestinian threat perceptions go further, however. At the most general level, there is the fear, already stated above, that Israel might seek deliberately to prevent any further transfer of territory and responsibility to the PNA. Total dependence on Israel's goodwill and judgment causes insecurity to the Palestinians. What would prevent a different Israeli government from reversing policy, or even from over-reacting, or exploiting any pretext to reassert physical control over Palestinian autonomous areas? How can the PNA react, if the Israeli authorities decide that only a pro-active, covert security policy by undercover agents in Palestinian autonomous areas will work to prevent terrorism - although such activity might by the same measure undermine the PNA, and irrevocably alienate its public? The Palestinians have little say in the matter, and their choice options are little more than the acceptance or the rejection of Israeli decisions on security matters.

At the wider level, the Palestinians also remain potential victims to developments in the Arab-Israeli arena, or in the Middle East as a whole. Specifically, Israel might regard certain developments as sufficient a cause to suspend the transfer of authority, or even to reverse it, because there might suddenly be a heightened risk of war with one or more states in the region. In such a context, strong opponents in Israel to the accords with the PLO might even be able to instigate "war" situations, if they wield sufficient government authority.

The ability of then Defence Minister Ariel Sharon and Chief-of-Staff Raful Eitan had of dragging the Israeli cabinet into a invasion of Lebanon, wider than it had been ordained in 1982, remains a sobering experience.

Mayerick Israeli officers might also mount covert operations with the aim of disrupting the peace process, as might the armed Jewish settlers in the Occupied Territories, who could number thousands. After all, it might take no more than a handful of Baruch Goldsteins (as well as Tel Aviv bus bombers) to destroy the process. The threat in all these cases does not merely address individual victims, but the Palestinian national enterprise as a whole. Incidentally, the Hebron and Tel Aviv outrages, and the following official responses revealed most graphically the radical discrepancy in deterrent and punitive capabilities between the PNA and the Israeli government. They also indicated the asymmetry not only in threats, but also in the possession of levers and in the ability to determine the response.

Finally, the potential threat posed by Israeli nuclear capability cannot be ignored. The threat is not direct for the Palestinians, who cannot be targets of Israeli nuclear use, because of their proximity. However they, like the Israeli public, could suffer the consequences of nuclear accidents and environmental damage. More seriously still, the Palestinians would become corollary victims, should Israeli nuclear power attract rival efforts from other Middle Eastern states. Therefore, movement towards verifiable, and enforceable controls on the regional proliferation of weapons of mass destruction must be a basic Palestinian aim. 5

Jordan: The asymmetry of capabilities also explains why the PNA and many Palestinians (though by no means all) regard Jordan as an actual or potential threat. There is a clear perception that Jordan benefits from many material advantages, since it is a sovereign state with the subsequent executive apparatus and physical control. The parallel belief exists that the Kingdom's leadership will utilize its advantages at the Palestinian expense.

The Jordanian-Israeli accords, signed between July and October 1994, fuelled this perception, and fed the deep-seated suspicion about a strategic coincidence of interest existing between Jordan and Israel, both being interested in preventing the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. The assumption is that Israel would acknowledge a Jordanian responsibility for the Muslim religious sites

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> The Palestinian position on a variety of regional security and military issues was expressed in the statement released by the Palestinian delegation to the Multilateral Working Group on Arms Control and Regional Security, Washington DC, 11 May 1992.

in East-Jerusalem, thus denying a Palestinian responsibility, and implicitly ceding political authority to Israel, again at Palestinian expense. The terms of the Israeli-Jordanian trade, coupled with the Israeli construction of new roads across the West Bank, are seen as an attempt to circumvent the Palestinians physically, to marginalize their role in economic management, and to reduce the commercial benefits they gain from peace.

For some Palestinians at least, the threat in the Jordanian case is of an existential nature, even if it is not of a direct physical assault. The PNA is also aware that the Jordanian authorities are in a position enabling them to exert direct economic, demographic, and covert political pressure. They can deploy further indirect pressure by undermining the Palestinian negotiating position in the future, especially with regard to Jerusalem, water, and external security.

There may be something both of a mirror image of threat perceptions and of self-fulfilling prophecies, since many in Jordan feel equally threatened by the Palestinians. The fear among native Jordanians (East Bankers) stems from the prospect of a Palestinian majority in a United Kingdom or Confederation. At the same time, Jordan as a resource-poor country has traditionally sought to demonstrate its relevance to the peace process or to regional security, as a means of attracting external financial assistance for budgetary and economic development purposes. A Palestinian entity next door, which would enjoy reasonably equitable relations with Israel (and major Arab states such as Egypt), could deprive Jordan of some of its raison d'état - as a force for moderation and a broker in the peace process. At the same time, Palestinian skilled labour and agricultural products would compete with similar Jordanian exports on foreign markets. There is a marked reciprocity, or mutuality of threat perceptions between the Jordanians and Palestinians that is particularly problematic for future peace and stability.

Other sources: Although other threats are not nearly as serious to the Palestinians, certain special sources of insecurity should be mentioned. Syria, which in the past waged a bitter feud with the PLO, has lost greatly of its significance and impact since September 1993. The Palestinian opposition groups in Damascus have lost virtually all their influence, and have not regained any, despite the discrediting of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> For a recent study of Jordanian security perceptions and policy, see Yezid Sayigh, "La Jordanie face aux réalités nouvelles stratégiques: les dilemmes d'un Etat-tampon", in Bassma Kodmani-Darwish and May Chartouni-Dubarry (eds), *Perceptions de Sécurité et Stratégies Nationales au Moyen-Orient*, Paris: Institut Français des Relations Internationales, 1994.

the mainstream Fateh. Only those groups with an actual following in the Occupied Territories have any significance, and their strength is drawn from their local support rather than from Syria. Besides, the further Syria moves towards peace with Israel, the more it becomes a *status quo* power. Much the same might be said of Iraq or Libya, who in previous years backed Arafat's opponents, but now suffer from international isolation.

The Palestinian opposition, largely the Islamists, but also the secular PFLP and DFLP, may pose a threat to the PNA and, arguably, to Palestinian social cohesion. In this case, the threat is primarily political, in the sense that the potency of the opposition lies in its ability to disrupt the autonomy process, and to antagonize PNA-Israeli relations. Failure to resolve internal differences may lead to civil strife on some scale or another, which would be a far more direct and damaging threat. Other sources of potential conflict relate to the presence of large numbers of former security prisoners (held by Israel for resisting its occupation) or PLO personnel, who have either been left in exile, or have been brought into the autonomous areas, but lack housing, income, and status. It is easy to conceive resentment leading to violence or to covert operations, on behalf of the opposition or outside parties. Latent regional or clan disputes may be aroused in such situations, increasing the risk of civil conflict.

# 4.5 Preliminary Outline of Confidenceand Security-Building

It is evident that while the danger of physical assault remains, the main threats to the Palestinians are not military in the immediate sense. This does not make them any less menacing, as in combination they pose an existential threat. The obvious implication is that the sort of confidence-building measures (CBMs) the Palestinians require, tend to have a high political significance. Two further, conflicting, practical implications follow. On the one hand, it should be easier for Israel, Jordan, or other parties to offer meaningful political CBMs, without affecting their own military security. On the other hand, the same parties might find it more difficult to offer political CBMs, without affecting their own core national interests and internal consensus.

However, there is considerable scope for the sort of CBMs most likely to help defuse tension within the Palestinian arena. The most obvious measure is the assistance to the conduct of general elections in the Palestinian Occupied Territories, and further, the insurance that such elections will be designed to

produce a politically credible and representative, and legislatively capable body. This would mean enabling all parties to compete, in order to endow the process with real legitimacy; and enabling both the parties and the PNA to conduct all related activities (such as campaigning) without impediment.

Ideally, the Israeli-Palestinian agreement on the nature and modalities of elections should also include one additional element, which has not been touched upon yet by neither side. This would be a clause permitting new elections in the future, or providing a mechanism to agree on new elections, as a fallback in case negotiations over the final status prove to be protracted. So far the elections are designed to be a one-off event. This could, however, lead to political deadlock, and to confusion on the Palestinian side, if a succession crisis occurred.

In any case, Israel should provide free access to population registers, in order to prepare electoral rolls. Indeed, Israel needs to provide access to population and land registers, as well as to other records (such as for water resources). This is part of a more fundamental confidence-building exercise, empowering the PNA to assume a real influence in the management of public goods and socio-economic policy. Movement regarding family reunification, or the return of persons displaced by the 1967 war is another major CBM.

The preceding examples are merely indications. The PNA itself could usefully employ CBMs, towards Israel or Jordan, as well as towards its internal opposition, achieving hereby a greater demonstrable effect. Clear policy statements regarding human and civil rights and the rule of law should be codified and, more importantly still, embodied in specific mechanisms and institutions (such as ombudsmen). Such mechanisms and institutions should serve to provide the public with independent channels for complaints and redress. Transparency in public appointments and contracts would also have a beneficial effect. Such an effect would also be attained thanks to a concerted effort to revitalize the education system, in order to absorb resentment and restore hope among the youthful and unemployed population.

At the end of the day, however, the PNA has limited resources. Even with good management and sound policies, the Palestinians remain the weakest party in the strategic equation. They can thus do little to pressure, or coerce their neighbours into altering negative policies. Besides, investments to improve

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> These and other ideas are contained in an internal memorandum prepared by the author while a member of the Palestinian delegation and submitted in late September. Parts were reproduced in an article in *al-Hayat*, 25 November 1994.

security can have unwanted costs, such as the reduction in other forms of public expenditure and infrastructural investment which are urgently needed. Yet, insufficient allocation of resources to security may encourage hostile attention. A graphic example of the difficulty of striking the right balance is the building of a strong police force which may make good sense at one level. On the other hand, such a project is very costly financially and unsustainable.

This perspective is unlikely to change much, even after a permanent settlement has been reached. Israel is unlikely to permit the PNA or any successor entity to maintain a credible military force, be it even for purely defensive purposes. The Palestinians simply do not enjoy the human and financial resource base sufficient to maintain a large defence force anyway. Even if an independent Palestinian state was finally established, it is likely to be, to a high degree, demilitarized. It would further have little indigenous ability, either to defend itself against both military assault and non-military coercion, or to deter such action by its neighbours. §

The implication is that external parties will probably hold the key to the balance between the threats to Palestinian security and the Palestinian ability to deflect them. This is an uncomfortable, but unavoidable position to be in, for the duration of the interim period at least. The above applies, even if the terms of the peace settlement are relatively generous, since geography, comparative economic strength, and external alliances will limit the Palestinians in the foreseeable future. Indeed, they will face an ardous task simply to prevent Israel from annexing East-Jerusalem and sizeable parts of the West Bank in a final settlement.

What this suggests, first, is that the Palestinians might be well advised to seek a negotiated settlement in which political and security borders with Israel are clearly distinguished. A "hard" border with Israel would entail the substantial loss of territory, given the balance of power and realities on the ground, and would not really enhance Palestinian security, be it military or political. A functional

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> A useful and recent discussion of these and other security issues is Jeffrey Boutwell and Everett Mendelsohn (principal authors), *Israeli-Palestinian Security Issues in the Final Status*, Harvard, MA: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1995. An older discussion is in Ann Mosley Lesch (principal author), *Transition to Palestinian Self-Government: Practical Steps Toward Israeli-Palestinian Peace*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press for the American Academy of Arats and Sciences, 1992, Chapter Two.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> This might include the deployment of international or multinational forces along Palestinian borders. For an early discussion, see Valerie Yorke, "Imagining a Palestinian state: an international security plan", *International Affairs*, Vol. 66, No 1, January 1990, pp. 115-36.

approach to the coexistence of Palestinian and Israeli sovereignties, marked by "soft" borders is a possible alternative. In this option, considerable horizontal overlap and vertical differentiation would prevail. This might pose "tactical" security problems due to the intermingling of populations. It would, however, have the advantage of shielding the Palestinian entity from the conventional forms of military threat or non-military coercion. <sup>10</sup>

The second, strategic implication is the need for the Palestinians to ensure a significant part of their defence and of their ability to deter aggression or subversion, by promoting and joining regionally-based structures for security and co-operation. This might mean a trilateral "Benelux" arrangement with Israel and Jordan. Another possibility would be the creation of a wider Arab-Israeli "security community" based on neutrality and co-operative security. At a minimum, the eventual Palestinian entity would need to find some reassurance in the construction of multilateral regional agencies in various fields - security, economic development and reconstruction, water, and environment (and, ideally, human rights and democracy) - and should actively seek the establishment of a Helsinkitype organization endorsing shared principles. The ongoing multilateral peace talks might provide a suitable framework in the latter case.

The above may be the wisdom of weakness. However, the best assurance for the Palestinians in the long-run of protection against threats to their existence and well-being lies in the establishment of multilateral organizations, that constrain the strong as much as the weaker states. A deep structural crisis is overtaking the society, the economy, and politics in a growing number of Middle Eastern states. Therefore, a co-operative approach to security, based on formal treaties and institutions, may make the difference between collective stability and individual chaos.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> These concepts are developed more fully in Yezid Sayigh, "Redefining the Basics: Sovereignty and Security in the Palestinian State", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. XXIV, No 4 (96), Summer 1995.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> The latter idea is developed in Ephraim Karsh and Yezid Sayigh, "A Cooperative Approach to Arab-Israeli Security", *Survival*, Vol. 36, No 1, Spring 1994.

This idea is developed in Yezid Sayigh, "The Multilateral Middle East Peace Talks: Reorganizing for Regional Security and Cooperation", in Steven Spiegel (ed.), *Practical Peacemaking in the Middle East: Arms Control and Regional Security*, 1995. Another view of the Middle East is offered by Ahmad Khalidi, "Middle East security: A Palestinian Viewpoint", *International Affairs*, Vol. 71, No 1, January 1995.

# Chapter 5 Threat Perceptions from a Jordanian Point of View

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### 5.1 Preamble: A Hostile Environment

The political environment which fuels the Jordanian threat perceptions, among leaders and citizens alike, is dominated by three major elements. First, Israel and the concomitant Palestinian question; second, inter- and intra-Arab rivalry and disagreement, which also include radical and extremist movements; and finally, economic deprivation. Since its creation in 1948, Israel has been, in one form or another, a permanent source of danger to Jordan, notwithstanding the latest positive evolution of their relationship. Furthermore, the dismemberment of Palestine and the expulsion of more than half of its population across the borders into adjacent Arab countries, mainly into Jordan, have been the most threatening developments to the Hashemite Monarchy.

Zionism, in the first place, did not confine its territorial designs to Palestine, but extended them eastwards to include other vital areas. These areas also comprised Jordan, as it is geographically defined today. Until very recently, extremist elements and religious factions within the right-wing Likud party propagated the myth according to which "Jordan is Palestine". Yet, territorial aggrandizement has not been the only feature of the potential and actual Zionist threat according to Jordan. Jordan was inundated with large numbers of Palestinian refugees and displaced persons, who were expelled from their homeland in 1948 and in 1967. As a result of these migration waves, the total number of Palestinians and their descendants who ended up taking residence in Jordan, exceeds two million. To them, tens of thousands of Palestinians who stayed in Jordan, as a last resort, must be added. They had either been deported by Israel, or denied the right to return to their homes on technical grounds after having left the West Bank and Gaza Strip. They had left their homes with valid permits from the Israeli military authorities, which should have allowed them to go back within a specific period of time.

Above all and beyond the territorial and demographic threats for Jordan that emanated from the Arab-Israeli struggle over Palestine, Israel's overwhelming military power constituted a direct threat to Jordan. The two countries have fought two major wars, in addition to several other major battles.

The two-pronged threats perceived by Jordan of Israel, on the one hand, and of the Palestinian problem on the other, were further combined with Amman's almost constant mediocre relationship - at a strategic level - with key Arab actors. The confederal nature of the modern Arab political system, created in the wake of World War I, served as a backdrop to the Arab Cold War, which was marked by inter-Arab rivalry and competition, as well as by mistrust and by deep historical and personal antagonisms between the leading Arab regimes as well as between their leaders. Such a framework deepened disagreement and confrontation between them. The result has been a fragmented, ineffective and volatile Arab order. On several occasions, disagreement between two or more Arab states has escalated to open hostilities and perfidy. Due to historical and strategic considerations, Jordan has been very sensitive to Arab in-fighting, and susceptible to any changes in the fragile and ever-changing Arab balance of power.

In addition to this, the paucity of natural and material resources is a main source of discomfort and worry to the Jordanians. Chronic economic difficulties and dependency have been major causes of concern to both ordinary citizens and leaders in Jordan.

Finally, Jordan has not been immune to threats posed in various forms to internal security and national identity. Public security and political stability, though not jeopardized as such, are always being tested by dissenting local forces within the country, who operate outside the constitution. Such groups usually find encouragement and support from other regional actors - both Arab and non-Arab.

## 5.2 Sources of Threat

From the above-described hostile political environment, the major sources of threat from a Jordanian point of view can be discerned, and can be summed up as follows:

- 5.2.1 Israel;
- 5.2.2 The Palestinian Problem;
- 5.2.3 Intra-Arab Politics and Inter-Arab Divisions;
- 5.2.4 Economic Vulnerability;

### 5.2.5 Extremism and Radicalism.

### **5.2.1** Israel

The conclusion of the Jordanian-Israeli Peace Treaty in October 1994, has significantly reduced the Israeli military threat to Jordan. The Treaty and its subsequent bilateral agreements brought an end to long-standing territorial and water disputes. Jordan regained its right and full shares in water, and restored its sovereignty over large chunks of land in Wadi Araba and the Yarmouk confluence, which had been held under Israeli control since 1950. An international boundary between Israel and Jordan has now been marked for the first time in history. Previous claims to Jordanian territory by irredentist factions within Israeli society have now been definitely buried. Thus the Treaty and its precursor, the Washington Declaration, were reached between the two sides earlier in July. These agreements led not only to the termination of the state of war between Israel and Jordan, that had been lasting for the past forty-six years, but also to a mutual desire to establish stronger bonds of amity.

The Treaty also allayed a latent fear among Jordanians of a possible mass transfer of Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza into Jordan. People like Ariel Sharon, Israel's ex-Minister of Defence, and many extremist Jewish Organizations used to advocate such a step every now and then. Although this may seem a far-fetched notion, it used to unnerve many Jordanians. The Treaty specifically prohibits any involuntary or forcible transfer of population in either direction. It has also paved the way for extensive economic and technical cooperation, including the establishment of joint ventures for both sides' benefit.

Still, this dramatic shift from a decades-long hostility to an amicable relationship does not totally erase some of the potential and lingering dangers Israel poses to Jordan. The military danger may have now been drastically curtailed or diminished, but it has not been entirely eliminated. Israel still possesses awesome military capabilities. Given its superiority over Arab forces - even when combined -, and coupled with the United States' unflinching support, it can tackle any coalition of Arab states. The Israeli leadership can project its military might and flex its military muscles at any time to intimidate any of its former adversaries. So, while the Peace Treaty has brought an end to the state of war between Amman and Tel Aviv, it has not ended any potential disagreement. However, a mutual commitment not to resort to force in the settling of future disputes was made. At the same time, this Treaty by no means curtails or reduces Israel's strategic dominance. The drastic imbalance in conventional weapons between

Jordan and its neighbour to the West is perceived by Jordanians as a potential source of danger. This is particularly true since Israel's record of self-restraint and peaceful behaviour has not so far been established. This concern becomes even more acute if one recalls some of the important issues which remain unsolved today: the refugee problem, Jerusalem and the many Israeli bones of contention with other regional players - particularly Syria, Iraq, and Iran. Given the limited defence capabilities of their small state, situated between strong and hostile countries, Jordanians will always have enough reasons to fear that their country, or even their skies, might be violated or used as a playground. This could be the case if a large-scale war erupted between Israel and any of its potential antagonists. This possibility cannot be excluded, since it actually did happen during the Gulf War when 39 Iraqi scud missiles, on their way to hit Israel, flew over Jordan. Hence, such a danger cannot be discarded in the future.

By the same token, Jordan cannot but be apprehensive about Israel's nuclear capabilities. It is an open secret that Israel possesses in its arsenals various kinds of weapons of mass destruction, including 200 nuclear devices, as well as the necessary delivery systems. Naturally, Jordanians' concerns in this context are consolidated by Israel's methodical efforts to deny its regional contenders any similar nuclear capability. This asymmetry is a source of everlasting worry, and has motivated Jordanian negotiators to keep the issue alive in the relevant documents concluded with their Israeli counterparts.

Military threats are not the sole source of apprehension on the part of the Jordanians vis-à-vis Israel. While alleviating threats of military nature, the peace settlement Jordan reached with Israel has introduced other forms of danger. Despite on-going consultations about potential co-operation in the economic and financial fields, Jordanian businessmen are afraid of being overwhelmed by Israel's large economy. There is sufficient evidence that Israel aspires to be the sole financial and commercial centre in the region, utilising the edge it possesses vis-àvis other competitors in the area.

In this context, Israel is seeking to promote its air and sea ports in order to become the primary location for travel and shipping from and into the region. During his first visit to Jordan last July, Israel's Foreign Minister, Shimon Peres, declared that his country was aspiring to become the 'Greater Israel', in terms of economic and technological advance. In fact, this particular statement is still echoing in the Jordanians' ears, and in the ears of many Arabs. The fear of a possible economic domination by Israel can be felt in many parts of the Arab world, including Jordan.

The fear of Israel's possible economic supremacy is coupled with another concern about the Jewish cultural penetration. The notion of the so-called 'normalisation with Israel' is still controversial especially among the public. Local opposition to cultural dealings with Israelis stems from religious, nationalistic, and social principles. There is in Jordan a strong lobby against normalisation, and against any form of interaction with relevant Israeli groups and associations. Behind this resistance toward an openness with new "friends" lies something more serious than national or political considerations on the part of many Jordanians. It is feared that contacts with Jewish authors and Israel's liberal culture would result in cultural normalisation and penetration.

Zionism is still an offensive concept in the Arab lexicon. It arouses to many Arabs, and particularly to Moslems, images of domination, occupation, and racism.

The afore mentioned fears Jordan holds against Israel are underlined by Israel's track record in the occupied Arab territories. Israel has repeatedly shown that it could commit the most serious violations of human rights against Palestinians and other captive Arabs. Thus, the past has not yet been forgotten and still fuels lingering negative perceptions about Israel and Israelis.

### 5.2.2 The Palestinian Problem

Jordanians are very wary of the actual and potential threats of the on-going Palestinian drama. Jordanians' fears relate more to the consequences of the Palestinian issue per se, and less to the Palestinians' aspirations. Such consequences would result from either Israeli policies or independent Palestinian activities or combined Israeli-Palestinian initiatives. Since the very beginning, Jordanian leaders have been apprehensive of the negative implications of the evolving situation in Palestine. Presently, Jordan is watching very closely the developments on the Palestinian-Israeli track. Most Jordanians are convinced that, whatever the final product of the stalemated Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, Jordan's security, welfare and internal stability will be negatively affected. Due to historical developments - some being irreversible - Jordanians, regardless of their origins, feel that the lot of some will be directly affected, whether Palestinian-Israeli talks succeed or come to naught. There is a high degree of uncertainty and ambiguity as to what the future will bring, as far as the Palestinian problem is concerned. A solution for the Palestinian problem, or the lack of such a solution, would bear the form of latent or actual danger to Jordanian interests. This fact exhibits Jordan's susceptibility to the developments to the West of the Jordan River. Naturally some divergence can be found here between the perceptions of

the individuals of Jordanian origin and the individuals of Palestinian roots. The preferences, as well as the perspectives, of the two groups  $vis-\hat{a}-vis$  available options for Palestinians on the West Bank and Gaza are not identical. But both sides feel that, irrespective of the outcome of the on-going process, their interests will be harmed in some fashion. Jordanians of Palestinian origin fear that the emergence of an autonomous or independent state on the West Bank and Gaza will undermine their status in their present abode. They feel they may have to choose between Jordan or Palestine as a homeland. This would not be an easy choice for many. On the other hand, individuals of Jordanian origin are afraid that the final product will not tackle their demographic concerns  $vis-\hat{a}-vis$  the former group. An unified Jordan has to come to terms with what will inevitably be a less than satisfactory outcome.

Going beyond the communal level to a higher one, Jordan's politicians are apprehensive as to the future choices realistically available to the Palestinians. At the strategic level, Jordanian leaders are always wary that the Palestinians would either opt for a strategic understanding with Israel - albeit as a last resort and/or tacitly - or succumb to its dictate. Either choice is perilous to Jordan. By the same token, Israel may absorb the Palestinians militarily and diplomatically, dominate them economically and succeed in realising its long-sought objective of separating the Palestinian population from its territory. Jordan resents the idea of such a scenario. Palestinians in this case would be forced to seek the realisation of their political and national aspirations somewhere else. It is probable that they would do so - as many Jordanians fear - in Jordan. Shimon Peres' notion of a "Benelux" comprising of Jordan, the Palestinians, and Israel is a nightmare to individuals of Jordanian origin. Peres is envisaging an economic union between Israel and the Palestinians and a political one between the latter and Jordan. This exposes Jordanian demographic vulnerability to its limits.

On the other hand, the idea of a collapse of the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations is just as threatening to Jordan. The prospects of such an eventuality are alarming too. The essential requirement for a stable Jordanian-Israeli agreement, for a durable peace in the region, and especially for the comprehensiveness of such a settlement will be seriously impaired if the Palestinian problem cannot be satisfactorily solved. The Jordanian leaders believe that a successful outcome of the autonomy talks would be less threatening to their country's interests than a negative result.

The Palestinian National Authority (PNA) is the other partner in the Palestinian question. The relationship between Jordan and the PNA is very complex. The PNA's inherent weakness vis-à-vis Israel and its ambiguous attitude

towards Jordan is a source of constant fear for the Jordanians. If the Palestine Liberation Organisation's track record with Jordan is taken as a precedent for the PNA, then Jordanian leaders and public alike should feel very concerned. Palestinian leaders have always viewed Jordan as a potential rival, and sought to undermine its position at different levels. Notwithstanding positive rhetoric about the inevitable and unbreakable bonds of understanding and intimacy between Jordanians and Palestinians, the actual conduct of the PNA towards Jordan is not very reassuring. The attitudes of the Palestinian leaders point to the opposite direction.

The PNA can still influence domestic politics in Jordan, albeit in a limited way. Furthermore, Jordan believes that Chairman Yasser Arafat and Palestinian leaders are co-ordinating closely with Egypt and Saudi Arabia, at Jordan's expense. Intra-Arab politics is a defining factor in Jordan's foreign policy, and Palestinian leaders are exploiting Jordan's estrangement with other leading powers within the Arab world. The latest controversy over Jordan's role in Jerusalem is a case in point.

The main reason for Jordan's susceptibility to moves from the PNA is the former's demographic vulnerability. Jordanian strategists are aware of the fact that the demographic situation inside the country is far from stable. The PNA requested the Jordanian authorities to allow dual citizenship to Palestinians. This would have enabled the latter to keep their Jordanian passports, and acquire, simultaneously, the one issued by the PNA. This request touched upon a central nerve in Amman. The issue has been solved temporally; however, the potential for future disagreement over the matter remains.

Demographic concerns dictate Jordanian demands for the full repartition of the Palestinian refugees of 1948, as well as of those displaced as a result of the June 1967 War. The Oslo Accord tackles only the status of one category of Palestinians in the diaspora, and postponed until the final negotiations the fate of the 1947 refugees. Jordan was host to more than 60% of the refugees, and the other refugees were distributed in major camps in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and the Gulf states. The well-being of these people, their future, and the fate of their inherent rights in their homeland of Palestine remain sources of anxiety in Jordan.

Jordan's inherent fears concerning this problem were compounded in 1991, when Kuwait and other Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries expelled to Jordan the Palestinians living in these countries. More than 350,000 people poured into the country in the space of a few weeks. Not only did they aggravate the precarious demographic picture in the country, but they taxed to the utmost the educational, health and other vital social services.

The PNA's economic and financial policies are another source of discomfort to the Jordanians. The Jordanian Dinar is the main currency in the West Bank and in Gaza. About one third of Jordan's printed currency is estimated to be in use in the Occupied Territories. At the same time, many private economic enterprises in Jordan have established contacts in the Palestinian territories. The economies of the two regions are intertwined. Therefore, Jordanians have always been very apprehensive to being subjected to the whims of an unstable and unreliable partner to the West. Furthermore, Jordan is likely to be affected by intra-Palestinian politics. Potential and apparent fighting between the Palestinian groups in the Occupied Territories could well spread or spill over into Jordan, thus disturbing the country's stability.

## 5.2.3 Intra-Arab Politics and Inter-Arab Divisions

The absence of a harmonious intra-Arab relationship has invariably been harmful to Jordan's security and welfare. Arab solidarity is vital to Jordan's security and to its internal stability. Jordanians always suffered when intra-Arab relations turned sour, and a conflict between two or more states erupted. The Gulf war is a case in point.

Yet, within the Arab world, there is an undeclared alliance between Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia. Jordanians have always watched the activity of this group within the Arab camp with anxiety. The tripartite summit meeting between the leaders of these three countries held in Alexandria, Egypt, in January 1995, reminded Jordanians of the potential problems this group could cause to Jordan if these countries acted together.

Although there is no evident cause for a serious disagreement regarding territorial or economic matters between Jordan and any of these states, analysts and political observers cannot fail to detect a lacuna in Jordan's relationship with every one of these states. The leaderships of these states have both individually or jointly, on many occasions, sought to undermine Jordan's position in the region. These countries have pursued some form of military threat, economic strangulation and political isolation against Jordan, on more than more occasion. At the core of this uneasiness in the relationship between Jordan and this informal grouping within the Arab system lies a divergence in outlooks as to how the Arab world should institutionally organize itself. The Jordanian Hashemite rulers, the descendants of the historic Hashemite leadership, have always been associated with the federal notion of an Arab unity. The unification of Jordan and the West Bank in 1950 is the most concrete example of this school of thought within Arab politics. The leaders of the rival alliance, Ibn Saud, Syrian and Egyptian leaders have always looked at the Hashemites' federal option with askance. They saw it as a constant source of challenge to them. Hence, due to this deep schism, no strategic understanding between the two sides could be realised, despite the existence of common threats that should have, otherwise, forced them to close ranks and co-operate actively. Jordanians cannot feel comfortable while their neighbours are accumulating large quantities of sophisticated and advanced weapons.

In a typical balance of power system - as is the case of the Arab system - maximum security of any party is a threat to the other participants of the system.

5.2.4 Economic Vulnerability

Jordan has a fragile economy. Although the country's economy has expanded at a steady pace, it has always experienced painful periods of interruption over the past few decades. Jordan's rapid growth came to a sudden halt in the early 1980s, due to the fall of oil prices worldwide, and to the concomitant regional decrease. Since 1989, Jordan's economy has been making progress, but at a slow pace. Economic retreat reached its peak in 1989, when the official foreign exchange reserves were depleted. The country devalued its currency, rescheduled its foreign debt, and adopted an austerity programme which included an import ban on luxury products, much higher tariffs on permitted imports, fewer subsidies, and lower government spending.

The bleak economic situation was further aggravated by the second Gulf War. More than 300,000 persons poured into the country over a relatively short period of time. This caused extreme pressure on the social services and on an already faltering economy, not to mention the impact of the newcomers - the "returnees" as they are called - on the demographic balance of the country. Direct costs from the moment they arrived in Jordan, according to official estimates, will reach more than \$4.5 billion per year, and this over the period of the next five years. This is only little less than double the country's total budget for 1995. The return of these 300,000 or more people not only tested Jordan's weak economy, but also highlighted the country's central dilemma, which is the gap between resources and population.

Due to chronic economic difficulties, unemployment has risen to around 15 per cent. In the wake of the peace agreement with Israel, prices were hiked further, and an element of unpredictability could be discerned. The problem of poverty has even worsened. Jordan is not allowed to trade with Iraq, its main trading partner, since the United States and its close allies in the GCC have been linking the lifting of the embargo imposed on Iraq for the past four years, to Iraqi President Saddam Houssein's departure. At the same time, the GCC countries are imposing a semi-official embargo on trade with Jordan. Even Israel still enforces discriminatory restrictions on Jordan's goods entering the Occupied Territories (the West Bank including Jerusalem and Gaza) and Israel.

In a nutshell, the country is experiencing serious economic problems, and in particular those of poverty and unemployment. Opposition groups are betting on further deterioration of the situation, and on the possibility of an economic breakdown. Original high expectations about the peace dividend have been dampened by the reactions of potential donors and prospective investors from Western nations and their enterprises. This has exacerbated concerns among the Jordanian population. The gloomy prospects of the economic situation, coupled with painful political compromises in the peace agreements with Israel, constitute a serious challenge to Jordan's internal stability.

### 5.2.5 Extremism and Radicalism

Islamist groups in Jordan are not as violent or extreme as their kin in other countries in the region. Their relations with the regime are at present not under too much strain. The relative tolerance with which the authorities have dealt with the mainstream groups in the Islamic Movement - the Moslem Brotherhood - has, so far, paid off. The groups have displayed rationality and moderation. The mainstay of the Islamists have confined their opposition to means allowed under the provisions of the country's constitution. But Jordanian leaders are not entirely reassured as to the ultimate objective of the Islamic Movement. External meddling or manipulation is possible. Their affinity with the two Palestinian Islamic organizations, Hamas and al-Jihad, remains very strong. Together with other active political groups, they oppose normalisation with Israel. Potential economic pay offs of the peace process seem to be linked to having normal relations between Jordan, the Palestinians and Israel. This means that Jordanian authorities have to pursue the "normalisation" to its logical conclusion, despite the vehement, though peaceful, objection from various sectors of the population and from powerful political groups. There is genuine fear that the issue of "normalisation" with Israel may undermine the present modus operandi existing between the regime and the opposition groups.

Problems such as internal insurrection, subversion and political violence do not exist in Jordan. Yet, the country has experienced such problems in the past. The domestic and regional ingredients of political instability exist. So does the fear among Jordanians of such an eventuality. The fact that King Hussein continuously stresses the necessity of preserving national unity reflects the concern about such potential domestic unrest. The domestic scene remains susceptible to being manipulated by external powers. Various ethnic and regional groups have strong links and achieved a satisfactory level of understanding and co-existence in the past. Despite this cohesion, social and national integration is not complete. The results of a recent poll conducted by the Centre for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan underlined this fact. <sup>1</sup> The maintenance of harmony and social

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Jordanian-Palestinian Relations, a poll conducted by the Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan, February 1995.

peace in the country is a serious challenge to its leadership. Saudi-financed papers and media-leaning toward Saudi Arabia's viewpoint systematically seek to undermine Jordanian-Palestinian understanding and co-ordination.

On another level, Jordan should remain aware of Iran, both in terms of it being a regional power and of its growing influence within the Islamic movement. Funds and weapons could funnel to extreme and fanatic Islamic groups in Jordan through Hizbolla radical factions within the Iranian leadership. However, it must be stated that the official relations between Amman and Tehran do not show any signs of serious disagreement at the moment. On the contrary, Iranian officials, at least publicly, are keen to emphasize the positive side of their country's relationship with Jordan.

### 5.3 Conclusion

Jordan is going through a process of change and adjustment at its political and strategic levels. The new era, characterized by a peaceful relationship with an old enemy - Israel - requires a thorough reshuffling of the structures, relationships, and perceptions of most groups and centres of power in the country. The articulation of wholly new terms of reference for the various political groups and actors is an unavoidable consequence. There is a need to modify attitudes, beliefs, convictions, and behaviours. The entire system is trying to adjust to and adopt the new realities. Yet, some data are still missing. One major element missing in the course of the entire process is predictability. This lack of predictability is coupled with a deep sense of disappointment, due to the outcome of the Arab struggle against Israel during the past fifty years. Uncertainty about the future and frustration, nurtured by past failures, are rendered more complicated by chronic economic problems. There lies the most serious source of fear to the ordinary Jordanian.

In the new era, Jordanians have to reconcile the new requirements of peace with Israel with the old commitments and the attachments to their past -politically, territorially, culturally, and strategically. A serious tension exists, at least in the view of the public, between the push of a new Middle East and the pull of the deeply held sense of belonging to the Arab nation. The prospects of a potential conflict, as well as the inevitable choice between these two poles of attraction represented in the political environment, are the most serious sources of threats as perceived by the Jordanians.

# Chapter 6

# Overcoming Prejudice: A Syrian Perception of the Israeli Threat in the Arab-Israeli Region of Conflict

Abdulhay Sayed\*

"Je ne conteste aucunement que le fâcheux blocus du golf d'Akaba était unilatéralement dommageable à votre pays et je ne méconnais pas que celui-ci eût lieu de se sentir menacé, étant donné la tension où était plongée la région palestinienne par suite du flot d'invectives prodiguées à l'encontre d'Israël en même temps que le sort lamentable des Arabes réfugiés en Jordanie ou relégués à Gaza. Mais je demeure convaincu qu'en passant outre aux avertissements donnés, en temps voulu, à votre gouvernement par celui de la République Française, en entamant les hostilités, en prenant, par la force des armes, possession de Jérusalem, et de maints territoires jordaniens, égyptiens, et syriens, en y pratiquant la répression et les expulsions, qui sont inévitablement les conséquences d'une occupation dont tout indique qu'elle tend à l'annexion, en affirmant devant le monde que le règlement du conflit ne peut être réalisé que sur la base des conquêtes acquises et non pas à condition que celles-ci soient évacuées, Israël dépasse les bornes de la modération nécessaire" Private letter from President De Gaulle to Ben Gourion after the 1967 war (Source: Henri Laurens, Le grand jeu, Paris, 1991, p. 214).

### 6.1 Introduction

The Israeli threat has marked Syrian politics since 1948, and largely influenced Syria's behavior in the regional and international context.

While both Iraq and Turkey share with Syria long borders and international watercourses, which could be a source of many threats, the numerous frictions that have occurred as a result of water issues or other border issues did not in any way develop into violent armed clashes such as those which have erupted on many occasions between Israel and Syria along their mutual border, or along the

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adjacent Lebanese territory. Although the Syrian border with Israel is the shortest of the Syrian borders, it has been the source of most substantial threats to the Syrians.

Self determination, occupation, recognition, nuclear weapons are the issues that make the Syrian border with Israel so tense, and that render the threats to the Syrians so eminent. Nearly a third of the Syrian population, which equals the Israeli population as a whole, lives in the Damascus area, only 40 kilometers away from, and thus worringly close to the front with, Israel. In addition, three quarters of the Syrian population live concentrated in urban areas, which stretch from Damascus to Aleppo, on a territorial surface equal to that of Israel. They are all exposed, in the Syrian psychic and as history has proved, to Israeli expansionism through aggression, and to the Israeli quest for domination through nuclear weapons.

The present account will describe the Syrian perception of the Israeli threat, in the Arab-Israeli region of conflict, as it has developed over the years. After reviewing the Israeli self-perception in the Arab-Israeli environment of conflict, as it has been voiced by different Israeli experts and politicians, the paper will outline the Syrian perceptions of the threats emanating from Israel. A brief analysis shall then be devoted to the impact of these perceptions on the present peace negotiations. The paper shall conclude by identifying the possible means to overcome deadlocks, resulting from the opposing perceptions, in the course of the present peace negotiations.

# 6.2 The Israeli Perception of Threat as Understood by Syrians

# 6.2.1 An Overview of the Israeli Perceptions of the Threats Emanating From Syria

According to Israeli sources, the idea that it was the Arabs, and only the Arabs, who initiated hostilities<sup>1</sup> in this region by refusing, without any justification, the "very existence"<sup>2</sup> of the peaceful and democratic "Israeli" state amongst them, is very much present in the Israeli consciousness. Arab hostility is indeed unequivocally evidenced by the huge Arab arms build-up,<sup>3</sup> not only in conventional weapons, but also in non-conventional mass destruction weaponry<sup>4</sup> and missile capabilities. In fact, it is extremely alarming, for Israelis, to observe that in the Arab countries ample financial resources are still being devoted to armament, despite apparent economic difficulties in most Arab societies.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> See for example, Yehoshafat Harrkabi, Arab Strategies and Israel's Response, 1977; Shmuel Limone, The Arab Threat: The Israeli Perspective, Chapter 2 of this book, p. 9; Alpher, "Israel's Security Concerns in the Peace Process", International Affairs, Vol. 70, No 2, 1994, p. 231; Mordechai Gur, "Destabilizing Elements of the Middle East Military Balance", in Arms Control in the Middle East, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, Study No 15, 1990, p. 13; Daniel Pipes, "Is Damascus Ready for Peace", Foreign Affairs, 1990, p. 38; Ariel Levite, "Israel's Security Conception and its Attitude Toward Arms Control", in Arms Control in the Middle East, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, Study No 15, 1990, p. 125; Gerald Steinberg, A Realistic Approach to Arms Control: An Israeli Perspective, UNIDIR, Conference of Research Institutes in the Middle East, 1994, p. 70; Aryeh Shalev, Israel and Syria: Peace and Security on the Golan, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, Study No 24, 1994, p. 11; Ariel Levite, "Israel's Security Concerns: Characteristics and Implications", in Shai Feldman (ed.), Confidence Building and Verification: Prospects in the Middle East, Jaffee Center For Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1994, pp. 184-194, p. 186; Shai Feldman, Israel's National Security: Perceptions and Policy, paper presented at the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflicts' Workshop on "A Future Security Architecture in the Middle East", held in Cyprus on 17-19 August 1995, p. 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Shalheveth Freier, A Nuclear Weapon Free Zone in the Middle East and its Ambiance, UNIDIR, project on "Confidence Building in the Middle East", pp. 10, 12; Ze'ev Begin, "The Likud Vision for Israel at Peace", Foreign Affairs, Fall 1991, pp. 21-36.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> See for example Shmuel Limone, *op. cit.*, pp. 2, 6; Ze'ev Begin, *The Likud Vision*, pp. 29, 33; Shai Feldman, "Security and Arms Control in the Middle East: An Israeli Perspective", in Shelley Stahl and Geoffrey Kemp (eds), *Arms Control and Weapons Proliferation in the Middle East and South Asia*, 1991, pp. 75-91; Mordechai Gur, *Destabilizing Elements*, pp. 9, 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Shai Feldman, op. cit., p. 78.

Many Israelis argue that the post-conflictual regional security of the "Middle East" should only address the situation of Israel as "a small nation within a large collective of mostly hostile states". To Israelis, the source of their security preoccupation not only is the violent hostility of the Arabs. According to them, the vulnerability of the Israeli society should also be taken into consideration in this respect. Indeed, Israelis continuously stress how disadvantageous in strategic depth<sup>6</sup>, inferior in population, feeble to sustain long wars, unsupported by anyone in the world, and dependent on the whole world for every source of energy or income Israel is. All these factors of vulnerability have had for the Israelis considerable direct repercussions on their security.

Israeli experts often conclude that Israel, and only Israel, feels insecure, <sup>10</sup> and that to a large extent the violent and hostile Arab neighbors have always been the source of this insecurity. To many Israelis, Syria has always been, and still is, hostile to Israel. Israelis often direct their interlocutors to the merciless and unprovoked Syrian harassment and to the hostility against the Israeli northern demographic concentrations before 1967. <sup>11</sup> It is in response to the threat posed by the Syrian heavy artillery on the Golan before 1967 that Israel, according to the official Israeli declarations, took the Golan in order to guarantee the security of its northern borders. Israelis often point to the Hizbollah attacks on northern Israel as having also been inspired from, and sponsored to a large extent by, Syria. Many Israelis have indeed the firm conviction that the termination of the Hizbollah attacks on northern Israel depends largely on decisions taken by the Syrians.

## 6.2.2 Israeli Strategies

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Shalheveth Freier, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> See for example Alpher, *op. cit.*, p. 231; Shmuel Limone, *op. cit.*, p. 2, 4; Yair Evron, *Israel*, p. 279; Shai Feldman, *op. cit.*, p. 77; Mordechai Gur, *op. cit.*, pp. 9, 13; Avi Kober, "Deterrence, Early Warning and Strategic Decision: The Israeli Security Conception in the Wake of the Gulf War", *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 15, No 3, December 1994, pp. 228-250.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> See for example Shmuel Limone, op. cit., p. 3; Yair Evron, op. cti., p. 279; Dore Gold, "Evaluating the Threat to Israel in an Era of Change", in Shai Feldman and Ariel Levite (eds), Arms Control and the New Middle East Security Environment, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1994, p. 100.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Shai Limone, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> M. Arens, Toward a Strategically Stable Middle East..., p. 135.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> See for example B. Netanyahu, A Place among the Nations, p. 133.

To face the presumedly unjustified hostility from the Arab world, and to overcome the existing asymmetry in number vis-à-vis the Arabs, Israel has pursued a strategy of stressing absolute qualitative superiority<sup>12</sup> vis-à-vis Arabs. More specifically, Israeli planners adopted a strategy of "cumulative deterrence" against the Arabs. This refers, according to Israel's founding father, Ben-Gurion, to the conviction that Israel's Arab neighbors would not accept Israel as a permanent factor in the region, until the Jewish state established a record of repeated successes on the battlefield, that would convince the Arab states that Israel could not be defeated militarily. This implied that Israel should, in one way or another, overcome the inherent asymmetry in the attributes of force between itself and the Arab states, and withstand the confrontation of any coalition between two or more This Israeli structural inferiority created the imperative for Israel, Arab states. according to its experts, to wage short wars, and to avoid waging war on Israeli soil. The strategy adopted to this end was based on the principle of delivering the battle to the enemy's territory as rapidly as possible. The principle was accompanied by an offensive military doctrine, that emphasized preemptive strikes. <sup>14</sup> Israel also relied on achieving considerable qualitative superiority with the acquisition of high technology weapons of all sorts and configurations.

A central pillar of the Israeli "cumulative deterrence" has also been the posture of ambiguity with regard to its possession of nuclear weapons. <sup>15</sup> This "strategic deterrence" has guaranteed Israel nationhood, <sup>17</sup> in a region where its very existence has been denied. <sup>18</sup> Indeed, the importance given by the Arabs to the presumed Israeli nuclear capability provides ample evidence for the effective contribution of this potential to Israel's cumulative deterrence. The extended deterrence by the Western allies, especially the United States, should not be

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Mordachai Gur, op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Shai Feldman, "Israel's Changing Environment: Implication for Arms Control", in Confidence Building and Verification: Prospects in the Middle East, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1994, p. 196.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Ibid., Yair Evron, Israel's Nuclear Dilemma, New York, 1994, p. 43.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> For an explanation of Israel's ambiguous posture see Yair Evron, *op. cit.*, New York, 1994, p. 270.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Gerald Steinberg, "Middle East Arms Control Regional Security", Survival, Vol. 36, No 1, Spring 1994, pp. 126-141.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> See the reported declarations made by Shimon Peres in this direction in William Burrows, Robert Windrom, Critical Mass, The Dangerous Race for Superweapons in a Fragmenting World, New York, 1994, p. 282.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Shalheveth Freier, op. cit., UNIDIR, project on "Confidence Building in the Middle East".

ignored in this context. The special strategic relationship with the  $US^{19}$  has played a major role in the Israeli strategy of "cumulative deterrence".

# 6.3 The Syrian Perception of the Threats Emanating from Israel

# 6.3.1 An Overview of the Syrian Perception of the Threats Emanating From Israel

The Syrian perception viewed the conflict and Israel otherwise. Syrians often rely in their perception on what has really happened, not on what is widely being believed in the Western sources. Syrian analysts, as other Arab analysts, would first point out that international, and specifically Western public opinion is largely influenced by efficient propaganda, that has for its purpose the distortion of reality, to the Arab disadvantage.

Many Syrians, as their fellow Arabs in Palestine, perceive themselves as victims of an enormous injustice directed against them, of incomprehension regarding their concerns, and of total ignorance of their rights. They have been persistently subjugated, since the establishment of the state of Israel, to Israeli aggression aiming at maximising territory, and to Israeli military superiority aiming at regional domination.

# 6.3.1.1 Israeli Aggressions Against Arabs

According to the Syrians, Israeli "egocentrism" and "intransigence" initiated hostility in the region. With its establishment in 1948, Israel, from a Syrian perspective, purposely disregarded the Arab concerns, and their rights to self-determination, threatening, with all means of confrontation, the peace and security of simple societies, who had been exhausted by centuries of occupation.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> For an evaluation of this special relationship with the US see William Burrows, Robert Windrom, *op. cit.*, p. 282.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> On deterrence theory in Israeli thinking see for example *Deterrence in the Middle East, Where Theory and Practice Converge,* Ahron Klieman and Ariel Levite (eds), Jaffee Center For Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1993; Avi Kober, "Deterrence, Early Warning and Strategic Decision: The Israeli Security Conception in the Wake of the Gulf War", Contemporary Security Policy, Vol. 15, No 3, December 1994, pp. 228-250; Shai Feldman, *Israeli Nuclear Deterrence:* A Strategy for the 1980s, New York, 1982.

Syrians stress the established fact that in all wars, and in each and every incident, of large or small scale, Israel had been the aggressor, and the Arabs were the victims who suffered the larger casualties.<sup>21</sup>

Syrians would recall in this instance that, immediately following the armistice agreement signed between Israel and Syria in 1949, Israel started violating the armistice agreement and the sovereignty of Syria, by inciting Israeli farmers to extend their border cultivation to areas assigned to Syria by the armistice agreement. <sup>22</sup> During the same period, Israel denied Syrian fishermen their rights of fishing and use of the Lake Teberias, of which the northeastern shore marks the border between Israel and Syria. <sup>23</sup> Israel's provocation went as far as to embark on a huge project of diversion of the waters of the Jordan river and then of Lake Teberias, in a way specifically impinging on Syrian territory. <sup>24</sup> The expulsion of Arabs from the demilitarized zones on the front between Israel and Syria continued, <sup>25</sup> and many Israeli air strikes against Arab villages inside Syria were also conducted. <sup>26</sup> Palestinian and Syrian resistance and retaliation against the continuous aggression directed against them was met by larger attacks and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Lecture delivered by the Syrian Chief Negotiator with Israel, Ambassador Mouafak Al-Alaf, on the "Middle East Peace Process", before the Arab Organization of Human Rights, Vienna, 17 February 1995.

Major General Carl von Horn of Sweden, who served as the fourth United Nations Truce and Supervision Organization Chief of Staff, described all the incidents on the Syrian-Israeli Armistice border, that occurred soon after the armistice in Carl von Horn, Soldiering for Peace, London, 1966, p. 115; see also Muhammad Muslih, "The Golan: Israel, Syria, and Strategic Calculations", Middle East Journal, Vol. 47, No 4, Autumn 1993, pp. 611-632.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> See for example Mark Tessler, A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Indiana University Press, 1994, p. 360.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> In 1951, Israel embarked on the drainage project from the Jordan river. After repeated condemnations by the Syrian-Israeli Armistice Commission, as well as by the Security Council. However, Israel having obeyed quietly resumed thereafter the National Water Carrier Project, thereby draining water from the lake Teberias (see D. Neef, "Israel-Syria, Conflict at the Jordan River, 1949-1967", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. XXIII, No 4, summer 1994, p. 29; H. Laurens, *Le grand jeu*, Paris, 1991, p. 126, 130-131). This plan was of concern not only to Syria, but to other Arab States as well. In 1960, the Arab League called it an "act of aggression against the Arabs" (see M. Tessler, *A History...*, p. 360).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> See D. Neef, Israel-Syria..., p. 31-32; see also Odd Bull, War and Peace in the Middle East: The Experiences and Views of a UN Observer, London, 1976, p. 50.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> See the Security Council Resolutions condemning the Israeli aggressions UNSC Res. 93 (1951) of 18 May 1951 S/215799; UNSC Res. 111 (1956) of 19 January 1956 S/3538; UNSC Res. 171 (1962) of 9 April 1962 S/51119; see in general D. Neef, *Israel-Syria...*, p. 34; H. Laurens, *Le grand jeu*, p. 127.

aggression on the part of the Israelis.<sup>27</sup> After launching an unprovoked all-out military assault on Egypt with the help of France and Britain,<sup>28</sup> Israeli aggression, from the Syrian perspective, culminated in the 1967 attack that permitted Israel to occupy territories, the area of which exceeded that of Israel itself.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> As pointed out above, the argument has often been made in Israeli sources that their attacks had deterrent value, and were indeed indispensable to Israel's security, as they took place only in reaction to hostilities from the Arabs. Nevertheless experience, from a Syrian perspective, shows that Israel's aggressivity has only been indispensable to its expansionist intentions. In the attack conducted by Sharon against a Syrian village in 1955, Israel justified its action by arguing that the raid was in retaliation for a previous day's incident, in which Syrian troops had fired (causing no casualties) at an Israeli patrol boat on lake Tiberias. This argument was disbelieved by objective research. According to Benny Morris, the raid was a well rehearsed military assault with border aims. For Morris, "the thinking behind the strike was to provoke Egypt into honoring its recent mutual defense pact with Syria by attacking Israel, thereby igniting the war Israel sought with Egypt". (See B. Morris, Israel's Border Wars..., p. 364). Indeed Aryeh Shalev from the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, after a careful scrutiny of the incidents that occurred between Israel and Syria from the signing of the armistice agreement until 1967, concluded that "Israel was not always the innocent lamb and Syria not always the wolf. In the first years of the armistice regime, it was Israel that tried unilaterally to effect changes in the status quo in the Demilitarized Zones." (A. Shalev, Israel and Syria, Peace and Security on the Golan, Jaffee Center of Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1994, p. 45.)

In response to Israel's increasing efforts for armament, but especially to the Baghdad Pact, Nasser concluded the famous Czech arms deal in 1955. This was considered intolerable in Israel. This deal immediately raised the specter of an Israeli preemptive war, before Egypt absorbed the new weapons and became too strong. Nevertheless, Israel, according to Morris, could not launch an unprovoked all-out assault on the Egyptian army, for it would have been branded the aggressor, and have lost Western support. The policy of trapping Nasser into war by provoking him by a series of "justified" air strikes on Arab and especially Syrian villages revealed to be thus indispensable (see B. Morris, *Israel's Border Wars...*, p. 279; M. Tessler, *op. cit.*, p. 346; H. Laurens, *op. cit.*, p. 139).

In the 1967 war, Israel justified its massive attack stating it had acted in self-defense in the face of the growing threat posed by Syrian heavy artillery on the Golan heights. President Nasser's bellicous actions, and his asking the UN troops stationed in Sinai, as a result of previous Israeli aggression to leave, and his order to close the strait of Tiran were also perceived as threatening by Israel. (See for example S. Freier, *op. cit.*, p. 11). Nevertheless, it has been remarked from objective reliable sources that the threat posed to Israel by Syrian heavy artillery on the Golan before 1967 does not appear to have had at the time the prominence, that it subsequently acquired in Israeli pronouncements. Donald Neef observed that none of the UNTSO chiefs of staff in their *mémoires* considered the Golan gun emplacements as especially menacing. Neef seldom mentions the heights at all. Indeed, UNTSO Chief of Staff, von Horn, was one of the few to make a direct reference to Syrian guns on the Golan, remarking "it is unlikely that these would ever have come into action had it not *been for Israeli provocation*" (emphasis added). (See C. von Horn, *op. cit.*, p. 117). For Neef, "the efficacy of Syrian artillery on the Golan Heights was not great enough to

## 6.3.1.2 Israel's Expansionism

Israel's continuous aggressions, based on a deep anchored expansionist ideology, <sup>30</sup> aspiring to create an Israeli state with influence in the territories from the Nile to Euphrates, <sup>31</sup> have long constituted serious sources of threats to Arab and Syrian security, and represented enormous factors of instability that have marked the region since the creation of the state of Israel. <sup>32</sup>

To the Syrians, all large scale wars initiated since the creation of Israel, and all actions of aggression of a smaller scale, but certainly not of lesser impact, were acts of aggression for the expansion of Israel. With each war, Israel conquered territories, and was always reluctant to relinquish them by negotiation. Negotiation, in Israel's eyes, is about imposing recognition for the new expansion.<sup>33</sup> With each conquest, Israel sought to expel the indigenous and to

deter Israel from taking over the DMZ and the water of the Jordan Valley, or to prevent Israel's capture of the heights. And while there appears to be no reliable record of the total casualties caused by Syrian guns aimed at Israeli civilians between 1949 and 1967, not a single Israeli civilian is reported to have been killed by Syrian artillery in the six months before the 1967 war, a period of intense skirmishes between the two countries". (See D. Neef, op. cit., p. 38). As for the Egyptian front, it has been rightly observed that Nasser, in all his moves preceding the Israeli aggression, had defensive intentions only. According to Tessler, "convinced that Israel was indeed preparing to attack Syria, Nasser, according to the Egyptian-Syrian mutual defense agreement, reasoned that Israel might be deterred by the prospect of having to fight on a second front, and it is with this is mind that a redeployment of Egyptian forces in Sinai had been initiated...If Israel did invade Syria, the intensity of its strike would perhaps be weakened by a need to hold forces in reserve for action on the southern front...All of these possibilities emphasize the defensive character of Nasser's intentions and assert that Egypt was acting so as to reduce the possibility of war". (See M. Tessler, op. cit., p. 390.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Lecture delivered by the Syrian Chief Negotiator with Israel, Ambassador Mouafak Al-Alaf, on the "Middle East Peace Process", before the Arab Organization of Human Rights, Vienna, February 17, 1995. For an explanation of the Syrian view on Israeli expansionism see A. Drysdale, R. Hinnebusch, Syria and the Middle East Peace Process, New York, 1991, p. 129.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> See for example Ian Lustick, For the Land and the Lord: Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel, New York, p. 105.

Muhammad Muslih, "The Golan: Israel, Syria, and Strategic Calculations", Middle East Journal, Vol. 47, No 4, Autumn 1993, p. 627.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Immediately after the 1967 aggression, Moshe Dayan is reported to have said that Israel "cannot go back to the ridicule frontiers of 1948". The then Israeli Foreign Minister, Mr. Abba Eban, declared that he "does not believe that the map of June 5th can be reestablished", (see The Palestine Question, Seminar of Arab Jurists on Palestine, Algiers, 22-27 July 1967, excerpts of which published in Moore Jhon Norton, The Arab-Israeli Conflict, Princeton University Press, Vol. 1, p. 379.

settle newcomers from all over the world. Israel's reluctance to recognize any Palestinian state in the Occupied Territories, Israel's annexation of the occupied Syrian Golan,<sup>34</sup> and finally Israel's actual refusal to return the Golan are all conclusive indicators of Israel's aspiration for expansion.

## 6.3.1.3 Israeli Military Advantage

Israel continues to pursue, as it has always done, a strong qualitative conventional military superiority at all times,<sup>35</sup> and against all Arabs. The commitment of many Western countries, since the establishment of the Israeli

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> On 14 December 1981, Israel promulgated a law according to which the laws of Israel were to be applied to the Golan Heights (see 21 International Legal Materials 163, 1982). Syria immediately protested considering in particular that this Israeli decision was an "affirmation of the aggressive and expansionist policy" of Israel. Syria specifically warned about the extent of the repercussions of this annexation for the security and peace in the region (see 11 Journal of Palestine Studies, Spring 1982, p. 199). Jordan also vehemently protested. An excerpt of its Statement deserves quoting in this context: "Israel has taken a new step on its aggressive and expansionist policy aimed at judaizing and annexing the occupied Arab territories by deciding to enforce Israeli law in the occupied Golan heights; This measure, which, in effect, means the annexation to Israel of that section of Arab territory, is one more in the series of steps taken by Israel in its expansion at the expense of Arab territory and rights. These measures include the usurpation of precious parts of Palestine in 1948, the occupation of other Arab territories in 1967, the judaization and annexation of Arab Jerusalem, and the establishment of settlements. Further moves have been to initiate the project for the construction of a canal linking the Mediterranean and Dead seas, the bombing of the Iraqi nuclear installations, the violation of Arab airspace, Israel's continuous aggressions against Lebanon and the Palestinian resistance. To this list must be added Israel's inhuman treatment of the Palestinian Arab people living under its occupation, who are heroically and unceasingly resisting Israel's schemes aimed at pushing through the self-government conspiracy, perpetuating the occupation and annexing Arab territory. This decision lies within the framework of the aggressive and expansionist policy pursued by successive Israeli governments..." (see 11 Journal of Palestine Studies, Spring 1982, p. 200); the Security Council, in its Resolution 497, deplored the annexation, and reaffirmed that there acquisition of territory by force is inadmissible in accordance with the Charter, and considered that the Israeli decision "null and void and without legal effect" (UN Doc S/INF/37 (1981).

<sup>35</sup> Lecture delivered by the Syrian Chief Negotiator with Israel, Ambassador Mouafak Al-Alaf, on the "Middle East Peace Process", before the Human Rights Arab Organization, Vienna, 17 February 1995. See also Drysdale and Hinnebusch, op. cit., p. 137; Helena Cobban, The Superpowers and the Syrian-Israeli Conflict, Washington, 1991, p. 73.

state to Israel's military superiority and "qualitative edge"<sup>36</sup> continues to add further concern to Syrian security. This commitment is neither compatible with what has been required from Syria in arms reduction measures, nor with any value of "just peace" commonly preached.

Particularly alarming to the Arabs in general, and the Syrians in particular, has also been the gradually confirmed information that Israel does not only have the technical capability to manufacture nuclear weapons, but is indeed stockpiling large quantities of strategic and tactical nuclear weapons of different yields. Furthermore, Israel does indeed possess a significant number of indigenously manufactured delivery systems. For Syrians, in such an environment of conflict, in which Israel enjoys absolute superiority at all times, and against all Arabs, through conventional means, Israeli nuclear armament points to the country's offensive goals, aiming at furthering expansionism through aggression. Indeed, Israel's combination of ideology and nuclear weapons is particularly threatening to Syria.

The Syrian concerns increase with the information according to which Israel has produced tactical battlefield nuclear weapons, thus lowering, for the Israeli army, the level of conflict needed to trigger nuclear escalation. The Israeli nuclear devices are no longer weapons of "last resort", but rather war-fighting instruments

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> See for example the speech of US President Bill Clinton before the Israeli Knesset in US Newswire 28 October 1994, White House Press Office. This speech reiterated the content of a letter addressed to the Israeli Prime Minister Rabin by President Clinton in which he wrote that he was committed to guaranteeing the Israeli qualitative edge. (See translation into Arabic, *Journal of Palestinian Studies*, Winter 1994, pp. 248-249); for an evaluation of this exaggerated help to Israel see W. Burrows, *Critical Mass*, p. 303; for an account on the US-Israeli cooperation see for example Helena Cobban, *The Superpowers and the Syrian-Israeli Conflict, Beyond Conflict Management*, New York, 1991, pp. 78-111.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Lecture delivered by the Syrian Chief Negotiator with Israel, Ambassador Mouafak Al-Alaf, on the "Middle East Peace Process", before the Arab Organization of Human Rights, Vienna, 17 February 1995, see also Al-Hayat, 8 October 1994. Some consider that Israel is a nuclear power, and the fourth largest nuclear power in the world. Its program is about on the level of the Chinese program (see testimony of Gerald C. Smith, Chairman, Washington Council on Non-Proliferation and the Arms Control Association, before the Subcommittee on Arms Control, International Security and Science, of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, of the US House of Representatives, in Proliferation and Arms Control, 17 May 1990, p. 4; see also the works of the Conference on Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation, Cairo, June-July 1994, in Arabic, in Al-Moustkbal Al-Arabi, 1994, pp. 115-118).

aimed at confronting conventional Arab forces.<sup>38</sup> In such an environment of conflict in which Israel has always been the aggressor, the Israeli statements, in the course of four military confrontations, three nuclear alerts - in two of which the contiguous Syria was involved - according to which Israel would not hesitate to use tactical nuclear weapons for any reason whatsoever, are largely enough to further increase Syria's sense of insecurity.

In addition, all Arab cities, but especially those in Syria, lie worryingly within the target range of the Israeli nuclear weapons. <sup>39</sup> They are absolutely vulnerable compared to Israel. The Syrians simply do not have access to any of the similar defensive systems which Israel has acquired, or has presently achieved developing. Israel is thus capable at any time, and with any given justification, of incinerating, with a limited use of its nuclear capability, three quarters of the Syrian population. Many large Syrian demographic concentration, such as Damascus, Homs, Hama, Lattakiah, or Aleppo, may well be declared uninhabited areas for a decade, as a result of any limited Israeli use of its reported nuclear capability. From a Syrian perspective, experience has shown that this is not an unlikely, but rather a very possible scenario, due to the combination in the Israeli case of an expansionist ideology with aggressive intentions, thus of irrationality with nuclear weapons. Indeed the worst can be expected.

### 6.3.2 Syrian Strategies

In response to the different sources of threat posed by Israel, Syria has oriented its action, following the second Egyptian disengagement agreement in 1975, towards the goal of attaining a "strategic parity" with Israel. Syrian awareness of the Arabs' inferiority vis-à-vis Israel, not only in terms of military capabilities, but also in all other sectors of life, due to the Western unequivocal support for the superiority of Israel, has encouraged its officials to preach such a strategy, with the help of the Egyptians.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> F. Barnaby, The Invisible Bomb, The Nuclear Arms Race in the Middle East, London, 1991, p. 64; Y. Sayigh, Middle Eastern Stability, p. 191.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> S. Hersh, The Samson Option, Israel's Nuclear Arsenal and American Foreign Policy, New York, 1991, p. 319.

Syria preferred to persue its own defensive "strategic parity" option vis-à-vis Israel for two reasons. First, Syria considered the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty signed in 1979 as being disadvantageous to the Arab and Palestinian cause. What counted most in the Syrian view was the Palestinian issue and the Camp David accord did not suggest any satisfactory solution. Secondly, Israel was continuing its military build-up, and was receiving all the Western support necessary to maintain its military superiority.

After the Lebanese war in 1982, the "strategic parity" concept mainly involved an accelerated military build-up, which resulted in a formidable expansion of Syria's defensive military capabilities. For Syrian planners, such an effort was primarily geared at absorbing any Israeli attack and then counterattacking on the Golan. The aim in the final analysis is to maintain the capacity to inflict as many Israeli casualties as possible, which Israel would find it difficult politically to stand, in any calculations for a surprise attack against Syria.

The concept of "strategic parity" did not only involve, in Syrian thinking, military capabilities, but also included economic strength, technological advancement, and the development of human resources. The logic behind the "strategic parity" concept lay in the argument that such a policy is primarily in response to the numerous threats emanating from Israel. In addition, Syrian planners argue that any peaceful negotiation for a just and comprehensive settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict can not be conducted from a position of weakness. A relative balance of forces in the region reveals to be indispensable for any successful peaceful endeavor to regain the Occupied Territories.

# 6.4 The Impact of the Threat Perceptions on Post-Conflictual Security Negotiations

Most of the stumbling associated with each and every step of the present peace negotiations between the Arabs and the Israelis proceeds from deadlocks, often caused by the differences in perception of the threats between the parties to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> For an account of the defense-oriented nature of the "strategic parity" doctrine see for example A. Drysdale, R. Hinnebusch, *Syria and the Middle East Peace Process*, New York, 1991, p. 140; Helena Cobban, *The Superpowers and the Syrian-Israeli Conflict*, Washington, 1991, p. 33ff; Francis Piccand, *La politique syrienne au Moyen Orient* (1970-1990), Thèse, Genève, IUHEI, 1993, p. 77; some nevertheless argue that the "strategic parity" concept is offensive, aimed at the elimination of Israel see Afraim Karsh, "The Rise and Fall of Syria's Quest for Strategic Parity", in *RUSI Defense Yearbook*, 1991, pp. 197-216.

the peace talks. The subsequent account shall describe in some detail the impact of such opposing perceptions regarding security, on some levels of negotiations, between Arabs and Israelis.

#### 6.4.1 The Security Arrangements on the Golan

In their negotiations with the Syrians, Israeli negotiators usually base their propositions for the security arrangements that should apply to the Golan on their own security perception. According to them, the only security, that should thoroughly be addressed in the particular context of the Golan, is Israel's. Israeli negotiators often point to the aggressive intentions of the Syrians, especially before 1967, when Syrian artillery continuously harassed the security of northern Israel. In such a context, what needs to be properly addressed are the Israeli concerns in this regard. Israeli planners fear especially a Syrian surprise attack similar to the one that occurred in 1973. They have continuously argued that after 1967, the Golan constituted a defensive buffer for the Jordan Valley and Eastern Galilee and for their civilian population. <sup>41</sup> The Golan offered some depth of an operational character to defend northern Israel. 42 In any Syrian surprise attack, Israel's entire north would be endangered. It is therefore essential, Israeli experts conclude, that all security arrangements be shaped so as to detect the early preparation of a Syrian attack, thus so as to prevent a surprise attack, and enable the Israeli forces to deploy in advance on the dominant terrain of the Golan. <sup>43</sup> The majority of Israeli experts seem to concur on a combination of security measures that contain considerable military limitations on the part of the Syrians only, 44 shaped to guarantee security for the threatened Israel.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> See the *Jerusalem Post*, Editorial of 21 August 1994.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> See for example Aryeh Shalev, Israel and Syria: Peace and Security on the Golan, p. 154; many have nevertheless disputed the argument that the Golan has provided more security to Israel, or that security zones, as in the Golan or South Lebanon, are viable. See for example Reuben Miller, "The Golan Heights: An Obsolete Security Buffer", in Mediterranean Quarterly, Spring 1993, pp. 121-128.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Aryeh Shalev, Israel and Syria: Peace and Security on the Golan, p. 151.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> As Yossi Olmert puts it: the Syrians would have to demonstrate goodwill in assuming unilateral limitations for the security of Israel see Yossi Olmert, Towards a Syrian-Israeli Peace Agreement: Perspective of a Former Negotiator, p. 30.

For an account of the various Israeli options regarding security arrangements, see for example Pa'il Meir, "The Golan Heights in Exchange for Peace: A Military Plan", New Outlook, Vol. 34, April-May 1991, p. 15; Aryeh Shalev, op. cit., pp. 134 ff.

Demilitarized zones in Syria, larger than those proposed to be established in Israel, the stationing on Syrian territory of some Israeli troops, mainly for early warning purposes, the unilateral reduction by half of the size of the Syrian army, and the redeployment of the Syrian army away from the border with Israel, are all propositions that have been voiced by Israeli experts and officials, without having planned any reciprocal measures on the Israeli side.

Syrian planners could not adhere to the Israeli conception of the future security arrangement on the Golan, for it is totally based on optimizing the Israeli security at the expense of that of others. Syrian planners continuously resented the logic according to which Israel feels insecure vis-à-vis Syria and that Syria has to provide whatever guarantee for the security of Israel. 46 They have repeatedly shown that Syria, as other Arab parties to the bilateral negotiations, have suffered from Israeli attacks on their sovereignties. <sup>47</sup> The Israeli occupation of enormous territories in a war of aggression is an example of its aggressive nature. The subsequent Israeli aggressions not only against neighboring territories, such as Lebanon, but also against non-neighboring Arab countries can only point to an aggressive pattern of behavior on the Israeli part<sup>48</sup>. To this effect, security guarantees are originally a Syrian requirement, more than they are an Israeli demand. <sup>49</sup> Syrian analysts would argue that all the security arrangements proposed by Israeli experts and planners involve unilateral limitations on Syria's sovereignty and do not impose any limitation on the Israeli side. Such propositions do not reflect reality.

Syrian officials recognize in their declarations, instead, that in each conflict both opposing parties have their concerns - justified or not - and security preoccupations, based on the supposed or perceived threats posed by the other. In

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> See for example Abdel Karim Abdel Samad, What is Behind the Israeli Security Claims, in Tishrine, in Arabic, 4 May 1994, p. 10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> See for example the Syrian Foreign Minister, Mr. Farouk Al-Sharaa's address to the General Assembly of the United Nations on its 49th session, in *Syria Times*, 4 October 1994. He specifically declared that "It is to be regretted that through its strong influence in the media, Israel succeeded in distorting information and reversing facts, to the extent that some circles of Western public opinions claimed that Syria used the Golan to launch offenses against the Israelis. By reversing facts Israel aimed at justifying its occupation of the Golan and its refusal to withdraw from it under security pretexts. The side that started the armed clashes between 1949 and 1967 was the Israeli side and not the Syrian side...".

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> See Abdulhay Sayed, "What about Peace with Israel for the New Arab Generations", in *Al-Hayat* (in Arabic), 4 February 1995, p. 17.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Asharq Al-Awsat, 4 April 1995.

the particular context of the Golan and the Israeli-Syrian border, both parties equally perceive themselves as threatened. The security arrangements that should thus be implemented should be reciprocal and mutual. Both Israel and Syria should feel reassured by the agreed security arrangements, not only Israel. <sup>50</sup> Indeed, Syrian analysts argue there should be a genuine Israeli effort to understand, perhaps for the first time since the beginning of the conflict, the real Syrian concerns. The security arrangements should also address, but not be limited to, the security preoccupations of the Syrians vis-à-vis Israel. For Syrian planners, any arrangement that would only take into consideration the concerns of one party only would be unjust, and certainly prejudicial to the interests of the other party in the long run. The Syrians also stress that the security arrangements should be symmetrical, balanced, and just between the two sides,<sup>51</sup> since the strategic interests to be defended and the defence capabilities of both Syria and Israel are mutually symmetrical.

#### 6.4.2 Arms Control and Regional Security Propositions

The Israeli self-perception of the inherent Israeli vulnerability over the years has dictated the requirements of the different Israeli defence strategies over the years. The same perceptions are now influencing to a large extent the Israeli proposition and conception for the post-conflictual regional security. The Israeli efforts to maximize their spheres of security at the expense of Syria, in the particular context of the Golan, are magnified and diversified in the larger context of the overall regional security.

Israeli Arms Control propositions all contain the simple idea that all efforts should be made by the neighboring Arabs to apply rigid, and maybe painful limitations on many of their defence systems, before Israel can envisage to limit

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> See the remarks of the Syrian Ambassador to the United States, Mr. Walid Al-Moualem, in Al-Hayat, 16 February 1995. He specifically declared that the Syrian principle with regard to the security arrangements were "indisputable and self-evident for parties desiring to build peace among themselves".

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> See for example the remarks of the Syrian Vice-President, Mr. Abdelhalim Khadam, in an interview with Radio Orient, published in Al-Hayat, in Arabic, on 4 February 1995. Also the lecture delivered by the Syrian Chief Negotiator with Israel, Ambassador Mouafak Al-Alaf, on the "Middle East Peace Process", before the Arab Organization of Human Rights, Vienna, 17 February 1995.

any of its corresponding systems.<sup>52</sup> For many Israelis, any Israeli qualitative superiority has, in the particular context of Israel facing the violent Arab and Islamic hostility, a stabilizing factor that should be preserved, even in times of peace, for the region to remain durably stable. Considerable limitations on many Arab conventional weapons should thus be seriously considered by the Arabs. The elimination of all Arab chemical and biological capabilities, in the context of the global conventions, should also be undertaken, as a further step on the Israeli Arms Control agenda. For the Israeli negotiator, priority should be assigned to controlling non-conventional systems of which experience has proven them to be destructive and destabilizing; that is, those systems that have caused massive casualties, suffering and destruction in regional wars, alluding specifically to non-conventional weapons in the hands of Arab countries. Limitation on Arab missile capabilities should also be discussed at a further stage in the process.

Any negotiations on the nuclear weapons presumably possessed by Israel, or on the establishment of Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone in the region should come at the end of the process. <sup>53</sup> Israel may accept, at this stage, to limit its capability in a regional framework that might be agreed upon. As has been outlined above, the Israeli nuclear capability was, according to Israeli experts, developed to deter threats to national survival. As long as threats continue to be posed to the very existence of Israel, the nuclear weapons will continue to be the guarantor for its statehood. For Israeli specialists, efforts to force Israel to give up its nuclear option without major reductions of the Arab conventional forces will be interpreted by Israeli policy makers as evidence that the "Arab states wish to retain the option of waging wars against Israel" with nothing to worry about.

The opposite standpoint is held by Arabs, and especially Syrians, usually viewing the major components of the Israeli military strategy as particularly

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Ariel Levite, "Prospects for Middle East Arms Control in the Aftermath of the Gulf War", in *Arms Control and the New Middle East Security Environment*, Shai Feldman and Ariel Levite (eds), Jaffee Center For Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1994, p. 120.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> Gerald Steinberg, "Middle East Arms Control Regional Security", Survival, Vol. 36, No 1, Spring 1994, p. 128; Shai Feldman, "Israel's Changing Environment: Implications for Arms Control", in Shai Feldman (ed.) Confidence Building and Verification: Prospects in the Middle East, Jaffee Center For Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University 1994, p. 202; Shai Feldman, "Security and Arms Control in the Middle East: An Israeli Perspective", in A. Shelley Stahl and Geoffrey Kemp (eds), Arms Control and Weapons Proliferation in the Middle East and South Asia, New York, 1991, p. 86.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Shalheveth Freier, A Nuclear Weapon Free Zone in the Middle East and its Ambiance, UNIDIR, project on "Confidence-Building in the Middle East", p. 4.

threatening and destabilizing. For Syrian planners, the Israeli emphasis on offensive military operations, preemptive strikes, and the transfer of the battle to the enemy's territory are seen as evidence of an "aggressive policy with clear expansionist aims". 55 Arabs often affirm that Israel initiated the arms race in the region, and has driven it to dangerous proportions afterwards. <sup>56</sup> At a time when Arabs had to confront the aggressive Zionist enterprise aiming at establishing, at the expenses of the indigenous Arabs, a Jewish state on Palestine soil, Israel enjoyed qualitative superiority over all Arabs. All subsequent Arab rearmament, in the Arab-Israeli region, was always seen as an effort to catch up with the Israeli superiority in conventional weapons. Hence, the presumed acquisition by some Arab parties of chemical or biological weapons was perceived by Arab defence planers to offset the Israeli nuclear possession. Chemical weapons were the "poor and the-wanting-to-be-weak man's bomb". Also, any acquisition by an Arab party, in the Arab-Israeli region, of surface-to-surface missiles sought in reality to counterbalance the deep penetration of the Israeli Air Force aerial capability. Missiles are mobile and generally cheaper than aircrafts, and do not require vulnerable exposed infrastructures, such as air fields for the air force, and enjoy effective deep penetration in enemy territory. To this effect, Arab experts and defence planers have always operated a link between chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, as weapons of mass destruction, and a link between air force capabilities and surface-to-surface missiles, as delivery systems.

As a result of such a perception, the Arab, and especially the Syrian, position<sup>57</sup> stresses in general terms the goal of arms control arrangements being that of ensuring that no state would gain a strategic or military advantage over the others, but that all parties should attain more security at the end of the process. Many Arab countries have emphasized the idea that the parties should shift the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> Ahmed Hashim, "Arms Control and the Arab's Strategic Environment", in Confidence Building and Verification: Prospects in the Middle East, Shai Feldman (ed.), Jaffee Center For Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1994, p. 173.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> International Atomic Energy Agency, Statement of the Iraqi Representative to the General Conference Mr. Al-Matook, GC(XXXV) OR.342, 11 October 1991, p. 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> For a Syrian view on the future regional arms control regime see Abdulhay Sayed, *The Future of Security in the Arab Israeli Region:* A *Critical Appraisal*, paper presented at the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflicts' conference on "A Future Security Architecture in the Middle East", held in Cyprus, 17-19 August 1995, unpublished; Abdulhay Sayed, *Syria Israel, and Regional Peace and Security Building*, Project on "Confidence-Building in the Middle East", UNIDIR, unpublished; Diab M. Zuhair, "Regional Arms Control in the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A Syrian Perspective" (in Arabic), in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Spring 1994, pp. 38-51.

focus in military doctrines from deterrence to basic defence, and that all arms transfers to the region should be modelled accordingly.<sup>58</sup>

As to the possession by Israel of nuclear weapons and Israel's constant effort to justify their continued existence in the region, even after the conclusion of peace agreements, Arab and Syrian analysts persistently assert that nuclear weapons are inherently destabilizing, <sup>59</sup> notwithstanding assertions to the contrary. The devastating destructiveness of the nuclear weapons exceeds by far any rationale for their justification in the particular context of Israel, especially since the latter has always enjoyed absolute superiority in conventional weapons against all its presumed Arab enemies.

The Arab and Syrian Arms Control agendas contain generally different priorities, that are more aware of the eminence of the different existing threats to the overall regional security. While Arabs and Syrian will endeavor to stress their national concerns when negotiating with Israel, they will also insist on the elimination of all the threats posed to the overall regional security.

It is according to this logic that many Arab states would encourage effective negotiation on regional security to deal first with the most destabilizing of weapon systems, and to end up with the least destabilizing, in relative terms. Negotiation on the establishment of a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone should thus come at the top of the agenda not at its bottom, as Israeli experts advocate.

#### 6.5 Concluding Remarks

It seems obvious that most of the technical problems between the Syrians and the Israelis in their negotiations for the future security arrangements to be applied to the Golan, and most of the differences between the propositions of the Syrians and the Israelis regarding the overall regional security lie in the opposing threat

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> Abdel Halim Ahmed, "Middle East Regional Arms Control and Security", in Confidence-Building and Verification: Prospects in the Middle East, Shai Feldman (ed.), Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1994, pp. 177-183.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> See for example Abdulhay Sayed, *The Arab Security Dilemma: Normalization with Nuclear Weapons?*, paper presented at the University of California, Los Angeles, Center for International Relations' conference on "Nuclear Proliferation in the Middle East", held in Cyprus, 19-23 August 1995, unpublished; Yezid Sayigh, Middle Eastern Stability and the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, Afraim Karsh, Martin Navis, and Philip Sabin, Non Conventional Weapons Proliferation in the Middle East Tackling the Spread of Nuclear, Chemical, and Biological Capabilities, Oxford, 1993, p. 184.

perceptions on both sides. Questions such as which party is more threatened in the particular context of the Golan, or whose security should be primarily addressed in the overall future regional security have not found a satisfactory solution yet. This holds true for the bilateral talks between the parties concerned, as well as for the multilateral talks stimulating the debate, between the regional actors over the future of post-conflictual regional security.

Israel continues to assert its position according to which the technical security arrangements on the Golan should primarily address the Israeli concerns, and that no negotiation on the most destabilizing of all weapons, namely the nuclear weapon, and no adherence to the global NPT regime can be made possible before all the Arab parties adhere to major arms reductions in all their defensive systems.

In such a context, the Arabs in general, and the Syrians in particular, will have to continue to assert as boldly as possible their concerns vis-à-vis Israel, in all negotiating frameworks. They will also have to navigate against the Western acquiescence to the Israeli security concerns, and will have inevitably to resist growing pressures requiring more compromise at the expense of their own concerns. A considerable effort of rational persuasion on the negotiating table, and in all other fora of debate on regional security, should be exerted by all Arab parties, to overcome the prejudice associated with the Arab perceptions and concerns, in order to make the Israeli party appreciate, at least for the first time in its history, the real concerns of the Arabs from the threats emanating from Israel.

A further effort should also be devoted to convincing the Israelis that durable peace and security in the Arab-Israeli region of conflict can only be based on the fundamental idea that "states can non longer seek security at each other's expense", 60 and that the unrestrained pursuit of national security interests at the expense of others is "not conducive to international security and may even lead to disaster". 61 It is thus imperative for the countries in the Arab-Israeli region to reconcile the contradictions between individual national security interests, and the overall interest of regional and international security and peace. The Israeli negotiator should be cognizant of the fact that durable security relations among all regional actors should be based on respect for the principles of equality,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> Johan Jørgen Holst, "Confidence-Building Measures: A Conceptual Framework", Survival, Vol. 27, No 1, January 1983, p. 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> United Nations, Study on Concepts of Security, Department of Disarmament Affairs, New York, 1986, p. 15.

reciprocity, mutuality, <sup>62</sup> and non-discrimination, and that these relations should reflect the desire of the people in the region to live in peace and equal security.

This would inevitably require the encouragement in Israeli society of conciliatory political forces capable of uprooting Israelis from their egocentric perceptions of security. A shift in the Israeli thinking, from egocentrism that has usually favored the national security at the expense of others, to a more genuine attention to the concerns of their neighbors, with whom Israel is expected to cohabitate, and to the requirements of the overall regional security, is indispensable. Indeed, only then can there be a durable peace and security not only for the Arabs, but also for the Israelis.

Diab M. Zuhair, "Regional Arms Control in the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A Syrian Perspective", in Arabic, in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Spring 1994, p. 39.

# Chapter 7 Security and Threat Perceptions in Saudi Arabia

Saleh Al-Mani\*

Saudi Arabia is a large country, its territory extends over 2,300,000 km (839,000 miles), and encompasses almost eighty per cent of the Arabian Peninsula. It almost equals in size the surface of Western Europe, and represents one-forth of the area of the United States. The country is the birth place of Islam, and contains within its boundaries two of the holiest shrines of the Moslem world: Makkah and Madinah. It has a special and reciprocal bond and affiliation with the world Moslem community of one thousand million persons, who live across the globe.

Beside Makkah and Madinah, the Jerusalem mosque is the third holiest shrine in Islam, from which all Moslems believe that Mohammed (Peace be - upon Him) ascended to heaven, and Jesus would descend upon earth at the end of the world in Jerusalem to bring back justice and equality to mankind.

Next to those religious bonds, that attach the people of Saudi Arabia to the holy sites in Makkah, Madinah, and Jerusalem, and that characterize the country, the second fundamental feature of Saudi Arabia is oil. The country is the largest oil producing country in the world, and holds within its territory approximately forty percent of the world proven oil reserves. It also produces five percent of the world petrochemical products.

The economy almost totally depends on the extraction of this mineral resource, and has always adopted policies which would ensure continuous and secure access to oil markets.

Within the three parameters of geography, Islam and oil, the security policies of Saudi Arabia can be read. Within these three basic factors of territory, society and economy, we can delineate issues affecting the country's foreign and defence policies. In addition, Saudi Arabia finds those factors to be a source of strength and confidence, as it deals with the outside world. However, its security, like that of many other states, exhibits certain limitations. These require the adoption of

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particular strategies in view of addressing peculiar problems of the Saudi security paradigm.

The large territory of the country required its leaders, since the country's unification by the late King Abdul Aziz in 1926, to seek the delimitation of the borders of the young state towards its neighbouring countries. The existence of extensive oil deposits along some of these borders did not facilitate the delineation, and led as well at times to conflicts due to the neighbouring states' ambitions. In few instances, such conflicts did erupt in small open border clashes. This was the case with the British, during their occupation of the Southern Arabian Gulf. This was also the case of the dispute for the control of the Bruaimi Oasis (1949-1955), during the small border clash with Southern Yemen, over the area of "Wadiah" in 1975. And more recently, clashes have occurred between the tribes of Qatar and Saudi Arabia in 1992, over the shores of the Gulf of Khor Al-Adeed. It is remarkable that in all of those clashes, Saudi Arabia has succeeded in limiting the size of the conflict and in accepting third party mediation. Saudi Arabia has always sought to find a just and a diplomatic solution to the at times difficult and competing national claims over border regions. Thus, the demarcation of borders by negotiations has been a whole mark of Saudi security policy. This is explained by the guiding principles of the country's policy, which are to reach consensus with its neighbours, to minimize the political ramifications of any dispute, and to enhance the security and stability of the region as a whole. In this regard, over the last seven decades, the Saudi state did succeed in the demarcation of its boundaries with Bahrain, Kuwait (1922,1965), Jordan (1925, 1965), Iraq (1922, 1939, 1975) and with Iran, during the reign of the Shah (the 1968 Median Line Agreement of maritime boundaries and ownership of disputed islands, gas and oil fields in the Northern parts of the Arabian Gulf). The boundary disputes were settled with the United Arab Emirates in 1974, with Oman in 1986, and with Iraq in 1981. Some of these agreements may have implications for other borders, plus other boundaries still need to be demarcated,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> For a study of earlier documents concerning Saudi Arabian boundaries, see: Richard Schofield and Gerald Blake (eds), *Boundaries and State Territories in the Middle East and North Africa* (Arabian Boundaries: Primary Documents 1853-1953), Buckinghamshire: England, 1988. For more recent boundary claims and those pertaining to Al-Buraimi Oasis, see John Wilkinson, *Arabian Frontiers: The Story of Britain's Boundary Drawing in the Desert*, London: Tauris, 1991. And Abdulrazak Abu-Dawood, *Political of Saudi Arabia*, a Ph.D, Dissertation, The University of Kentucky, 1984. For those pertaining to Qatar, see: Abdul-Aziz Al-Mansour, Al-Taour Al-Siyasi li-Qatar (*The Political Development of Qatar*), Kuwait: That Al-Salasil, 1984, (Arabic).

for which provisional arrangements are partly in place. This has been the case with Yemen (since 1934), and with Oatar (1965 and 1992). The Eastern boundaries with Yemen are still without demarcation, and the two sides are currently engaged in intensive negotiation to find a mutually acceptable solution and settlement.<sup>2</sup>

Another aspect of large landmass is the primary need to protect it against incursions by external forces. Most countries endowed by this attribute have historically found it advantageous to build a large land army and an extensive air force.

The dilemma in Saudi Arabia is that in the past, the country did not have the financial resources to build a major army. Since the seventies, it has sought to build a small all volunteer force able to defend its boundaries and its territories. This policy has obviously failed to achieve its goal. Many factors have militated against the achievement of this objective. These have chiefly been the limited size of the population (12.35 million), but also the resistance of many middle class families to send their children to military schools, and their resistance to adopt a reservist or a draft system of recruitment; as well as the existence, in the last two decades, of a thriving business and of government employment in major cities for the new generation. Until recently, army recruitment was almost exclusively limited to those who had very little or no education. Only the Saudi Air Force, the Air Defense forces and the Engineers Corps have been able, through financial inducements and social status, to attract the best and most capable university graduates.

This limitation in size of the population has forced the government in times of crises to dig deep into the very young pool of the population. However, with the economic slow-down experienced during the past two years, more and more capable graduates find it advantageous to join the forces, and to enroll in military academies. This has allowed the government to increase the size of the forces from approximately sixty six thousands in 1990 to approximately 102,000 in 1994 (IISS estimates).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> For a text of the 1934 Taif Border Agreement between Saudi Arabia and Yemen and subsequent agreements, see Abdullah Al-Qabaa, Al-Alaqat Al-Saudiah Al-Yamanieh (Saudi Yemeni Relations), Riyadh: Al-Farazdaq, 1992, Appendices, (Arabic).

#### 7.1 Islam and Security

Saudi Arabia, as the birth place of Islam, finds support and natural alliances in the family of the Moslem states. Military co-operation in the past has taken place with Egypt, Pakistan, Jordan, and Bangladesh.

A number of Islamic countries took part in the 1990-91 war against Iraq, and some of them like Pakistan, are reported to continue today their military cooperation with Saudi Arabia. Hence, Pakistan still has one division reportedly stationed in the country.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the changes in governments and cabinets in those countries, there is popular support to continued military co-operation with Saudi Arabia, for religious and fraternal reasons. The existence of thousands of expatriates has also helped to cement this relationship.

However, relations with Moslem states have by no means always been amicable. Relations with Iran have been marred by the 1980-88 Gulf war, by Iranian propaganda campaigns and marches during the pilgrimage season, and by Iran's incessant attempts to play the leadership role in the Moslem world. Thus, relations with Iran since the revolution have largely been competitive. Saudi Arabia views itself as the most imminent Islamic state, and this has put a huge burden on Saudi strategic planners. They have found themselves obliged at times to intervene diplomatically in attempts to settle disputes and civil wars among other Islamic states.

This has been the case, in the past, with the civil conflicts in Lebanon,in Afghanistan, and most recently in Yemen. Mediators are expected to provide aid and comfort to the civilian population, and financial incentives to the leaders of the different factions to reach a negotiated settlement. At times, this might also be perceived as partial. Saudi diplomatic intervention succeeded, along with the exhaustion of the parties of the conflict, in bringing an end to the Lebanese civil war (The Taif Agreement of 1989). In the case of Afghanistan, the civil war continues ablaze despite Saudi and other Islamic states' mediation efforts.

Religion also plays an important role in the historic attachment of Saudi Arabia to the suffering of the Palestinian people and the continued occupation of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> F. Gregory Gause III, Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States, New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1994, p. 125.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> For a text of the Agreement, see: Ittifaq Al-Taif: al-Salam Al-Manshoud, *The Taif Agreement: A Prospect for Peace*, Beirut: Dar Al-Liwaa, 1991, pp. 112-121 (Arabic).

their lands. Saudi Arabia works assiduously to bring about a just and durable resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and would do everything diplomatically possible to bring about the return of Jerusalem to Arab and Palestinian authority.

While supporting the Moslems throughout the world, and providing comfort and aid to those in need, the government seems to be wary of the continued civil disturbances and unrest visited by young Islamist radicals. Their life of poverty and their feeling of disenchantment have impelled them to rebel against the existing political order, posing thereby a threat to the stability of the regional system. Being a status-quo state, Saudi Arabia has sought to strengthen the existing regional and international order, and to maintain regional security and stability. Only by a harmonious interaction between the positive precepts of Islam ("Zakah" or voluntary annual gifts to the poor, respect for the family and the elderly, and "Trahum" or compassion) can a Moslem society progress economically, and enrich its moral values and virtues. The propagation of religious values, of peace and harmony with economic development has been the hall-mark of Saudi security policy. It has also sought the abatement of radicalism and of excessive political acts orchestrated by the religious right on the fringe, throughout the Arab world.

#### 7.2 Oil and Alliance Formation

Since the discovery of oil in the country in 1938, Saudi Arabia has sought the alliance with Western powers to enhance its military pasture, without losing its sovereignty in the process. Alliances with Britain, and the United States since 1945 have entailed at times the presence of some military advisers in the country, as well as the temporary stationing of foreign forces in times of crises, such as during the Iraq-Kuwait war of 1990-91. This did bring about some backlash and resentment on the part of some religious groups in Saudi Arabia. The country never has been invaded or occupied by an European power, and the stationing of foreign non-Moslem troops is inadmissible in Islam. Saudi defence planners have therefore attempted to walk a very tight rope, maintaining external alliances, chiefly with the US, on the one hand, and minimizing the continuous presence of large allied troops over its territory, on the other. Several policies were pursued such as an over-the-horizon force projection, the stationing of those forces in friendly neighbouring states (e.g. Bahrain and Kuwait) or in bases away from population centers, and the large keeping in storage of alliance armament and weapons for future access to those arms by airlifted troops, during periods of crises and/or turmoil.

While alliance formations with Western powers have enhanced the security posture of the country through deterrence against regional aggressors, it has also helped to give the Saudi army, navy, and air force access to the latest equipments available on the international market. And while today Saudi Arabia has a small ground force, it has a very good air force, and an emerging small navy that proved its capabilities during Desert Storm. <sup>5</sup> And while its air force might be on par with competing neighbours like Iraq or Iran, it is no match for the superior Israeli air force.

The alliance with the US has spared Saudi Arabia a military confrontation with Israel, but the country looks with anxiety at the hegemonic role played by Israel and its air force in the adjoining countries of Lebanon and Syria. It has sought throughout the last two decades to avert, and/or to limit any aggression by Israel on Lebanon. Further, it has worked with the American administrations and the UN to contain those military adventures (like in 1978, 1982 and in July 1993), so as they would not escalate into large regional wars. Saudi Arabia has also signed all the treaties and conventions limiting the use and proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction. It has further supported Egypt's call for the establishment of a nuclear free zone in the Middle East, in order to contain and reduce the nuclear arsenals in Israel.

As a member of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC), Saudi Arabia has created with the GCC states a security community. These states periodically consult each other, and have created a small rapid deployment force, the Gulf Shield, for possible use in any part of the Gulf region.

The military leaders of the GCC have agreed, at the 1993 Summit, to earmark certain naval and air force units for joint operations under a single military command. While all the GCC forces are very small in comparison with the big armies of their neighbours, those states have always co-ordinated their diplomatic policies *vis-à-vis* any act of expansion by forces from neighbouring countries. This was the case in 1990-91, and again in 1994 in Kuwait *vis-à-vis* Iraq. This was also the case when an attitude of solidarity was adopted with the United Arab Emirates which went against the occupation by Iran of the Tunubs Islands and of Abu-Musa.

The media campaigns periodically emanating from Tehran do not set well with neighbouring Arab Gulf states. Other ideological issues have also marred

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> See General Norman Schwarzkopf's autobiography, *It Doesn't Take A Hero*, written with Peter Petre, London: Bantam Books, 1992, pp. 421-422.

Saudi-Iranian relations. But it is the continued fear of a military build-up through purchasing and home manufacturing of lethal weapons, ballistic missiles, and an ambitious nuclear program that most worries military planners in Riyadh and other Gulf capitals.

Diplomatically, Tehran relations with Saudi Arabia have witnessed tensions and detente, but Tehran has always sought to increase its influence and intervention in regional squabbles. And while Iran may not invade other Gulf states outrightly in an immediate future, it has not refrained from pursuing salamitactics regarding some strategic Gulf states islands.

Another facet of the influence of oil on the security policy of Saudi Arabia is the capacity oil has given the state to buy friends, and eschew possible enemies in the past, through foreign aid. Between 1970 and 1991, Saudi Arabia offered its Arab and Muslem brotherly countries approximately \$ 96 billion in loans and grants. Approximately 64% of the total went to neighbouring Arab states. Some have argued that such aid failed to produce good returns, and that Iraq, Jordan, and Yemen testified this during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. One may argue, on the other hand, that those contributions have kept peace in the region for two decades. Saudi Arabia, despite its continued support towards regional funds and Islamic banking institutions, cannot afford to continue its large handouts. And despite suspicions of foreign aid as a mechanism for influence, Saudi Arabia as a member of the Arab and Islamic community of nations, has found it vital until now to extend approximately \$ 1.8 billion a year in direct aid, to offer educational scholarships, and to encourage physicians and medical specialists visits to needy Islamic societies in Asia and East Africa.

The presence of a large number of expatriate workers from Egypt, Pakistan, Syria, Turkey, and India in the Kingdom gives further impetus to those countries to seek the continued security and stability of the country. It was obvious, therefore, for most of those countries, to readily participate in the effort of the allied forces to evacuate Saddam Hussein's forces from Kuwait in 1991. With 1'125 miles in coastline overlooking the Red Sea, Saudi Arabia has sought to shield its water and islands from adversary powers. With this regard, Saudi Arabia has worked in the past very closely with those countries overlooking this closed body, to keep the Red Sea region away from external military projection, and/or occupation. These countries are Egypt, the Sudan and Yemen. The Saudi planners

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> See Al-Taqrir Al-Iqtissadi Al-Arabi Al-Mohhad, 1993, *The Combined Arab Economic Report*, 1993, Kuwait: The Arab Bank for Economic and Social Development, 1994, Table 8/3.

find it difficult to accept the continued Israeli military presence in the Eriterean islands of Halib and Fatimah, close to the Southern entrance of the sea, and to see the Israeli military ships monitoring the entire coast of this water body. Recently, Saudi Arabia signed a memorandum of understanding with Egypt regarding the security of Red Sea shipping lanes. This memorandum is to avert any reoccurrence of the 1984 laying of mines in the Northern lanes of that sea. <sup>7</sup> The interest of the two states in the peace and stability of this water way stems from the fact that Saudi Arabia has the longest shores on this sea (1125 miles), and Egypt holds the second longest shores (898 miles). Thus the two countries benefit from 64.8% of all the territorial waters of this body of water, and carry the corresponding responsibility for the water, for the security of their territories and for the welfare of their fishermen.8 A Joint Saudi - Sudanese Economic Commission undertook in the seventies a study on the exploitation of mineral resources in the maritime area and the coasts adjoining the two countries. Due to the lack of adequate funding, the work of this Commission had to be suspended in 1981.

As the Saudi economy picks up, and high industrial production gets into gear, by 1997 exports to neighbouring African states, particularly in East Africa, will ultimately increase. Jeddah, the Saudi major port on the Red Sea, is already becoming a major interport for supplies to African countries - from the Sudan and Kenya in the East, to Algeria in the West. And Saudi Arabia will continue in the future to view the Red Sea as its second arm to the outside world.

## 7.3 The Balance of Regional Power and Its Impact on Saudi Security

Saudi Arabia, as a middle sized regional power, always found refuge in fostering a stable balance of power in the Middle East. In the past, Saudi security reaped the benefits of a quasi balance between Egypt and Syria on one side, and Israel on the other. The decision of President Sadat in 1979 to desert his Arab brothers, and to sign a separate Peace Treaty with Israel opened up the region to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Al-Ahram, 21 October 1994.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> See Abdullah Al-Sultan, Al-Bahr Al-Ahmar wa Al-Siraa Al-Arabi Al-Israeli, *The Red Sea and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, Beirut: Markaz Dirasat Al-wahadah Al-Arabiyah, 1984, p. 36 (Arabic).

Israeli hegemony. Due to the lack of balance of power, Israel was able to extend its power in the region. This brought instability to Lebanon, Tunisia and Iraq.

Likewise, during the Iran-Iraq war, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states provided logistics and humanitarian support to Iraq, in order to maintain a sort of balance of forces between the two warring states, and to prevent any clear-cut victory for Iran. With the diminished power of Iraq after 1991, the Saudis sought a semblance of stability in the Gulf region. They may have urged Turkey to play a balancing role, but due to economic and internal political tensions, the Turkish government shied away from filling the gap. Today and in the near future, the continued existence of Iraq, as an unitary state independent of Iranian influence, will continue to draw the concern and attention of Saudi planners.

Today, American forces and marine presence in the Gulf seem to be playing a counter-weight to the Iranian challenge. Other bilateral and multilateral security arrangements with Egypt and Syria play largely a symbolic and secondary role. The understanding between Saudi Arabia, the United States, the United Kingdom and France seems to be a permanent cornerstone in the Saudi security policy. Selfreliance in security matters is a cherished, remote goal at present time. And the Saudis would do well to manage their alliance framework with regional powers (The Damascus Declaration), and with Western powers, in a way that would maximize the gains, and minimize the costs. Some of the larger allies will continue to use such alliances to maximize their economic gains, and to secure contracts for their respective companies. Such a policy may not always be beneficial to the Saudi economy, as it renders this economy dependent and uncompetitive in a world governed by competition for economic survival. Other economic and political policies advocated by those allies, such as the privatization of certain sectors of the Saudi economy, or the limitation of trade and technical exchange with the small, but efficient East Asian firms may run counter to the benefits of small consumers in the country, and to the efficiency of the economy in general.

Ironically, while the stationing of foreign forces in the Gulf region might have served the short-term security interests of the regimes, over the medium to long term it might weaken the legitimacy of those same governments. The governments will lose even more legitimacy, if they fail to pursue independent policies regarding oil prices and/or economic policies, that may adversely affect the welfare of individual citizens. Those are precisely the policies the Shah developed in the

1960's and 1970's, and which brought the degeneration of his legitimacy in the eyes of his people.<sup>9</sup>

#### 7.4 Internal Threats

Saudi Arabia is a self-assured polity, that has existed in some form of political and social organization since time immemorial. Throughout its development, the country has faced many internal and external challenges. Internally, the country has developed social structures, that extend help easily to those in need. Extensive family, tribal, religious and political edifices exist to lessen the weight between the various social classes of differentiated incomes. It goes without saying that the country's leaders must adopt new policies to enhance mass participation, and extend even further the benefits of economic development to new strata of the population. This concerns especially the young generation, which compromises more than one-half of the population. From time to time, small marginal political groups from the right seem to offer new ideologies that run counter to government line. However, through a system of control and inducements, the government has always been able to coopt and/or coerce the potential leaders of these groups.

In addition, Saudi Arabia and its people have always prided themselves on being the guardians of the two holy mosques in Islam. The security and sanctity of those two holy mosques remain one of the basic objectives of Saudi national security. Any attempts by a foreign power, under whatever disguise, to gain access to control and/or administer the affairs of the two holiest mosques would be contrary to the country's basic sovereignty. While continuing to guarantee free access to all Moslems, the Saudi government must fend off any attempts by Iran or any particular group or other state. Under no pretext may any of these actors attempt to diminish Saudi sovereignty and administration of the two holy cities of Makkah and Medinah - the spiritual heart of the nation.

#### 7.5 External Threats

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> It is precisely those policies that the Shah pursued in the 1960's and the 1970's and brought about the degeneration of his legitimacy in the eyes of his people, see Mark Gasiorowski, "Regime Legitimacy and National Security: The Case of Pahlavi Iran", in Edward Azar and Chung-In Moon (eds), *National Security in The Third World*, Aldershot, Hants, England: Edward Alger, and College Park, MD: University of Maryland Center for International Development and Conflict, 1988, pp. 227-250.

Externally, Saudi Arabia lies in a region which crosses the flux, in terms of power, and the challenges of the strategic environment. Collective ideological lines, such as Arabism and Islamic unity, that used to bind the Arabs and Moslem states in the past, seem to be receding. Instead, a new set of policies based on pure self interest and gains pervades at present.

In a sense, the nation state, as an entity, has succeeded in advancing its logic ahead of the other ideological and ascribable beliefs of the Arab publics. This secularization of traditional Arab politics has brought instability to inter- Arab state relations. Some traditional friends have since 1990 become adversaries. Saudi planners must therefore be always on guard against any potential regional threats, and must always be aware of emerging political movements in neighbouring countries, such as in Iran. This is the case of movements, of which the creed or the political programs, would paint a potential direct or indirect threat to the Saudi Arabia's security, sovereignty, and territorial integrity.

Potential threats may not always be limited to military means, but may also include ideological stances inimical to the belief system of the people of Saudi Arabia. The battle for a sympathetic public opinion, in the Arab and Islamic arena, is therefore of primary importance to the security of the state and its people.

Other immediate objectives for the Saudi national security include the deterrence of any threats to its territory, ports, oil and petroleum infrastructure, major industrial complexes, and major city centers. Potential threats should not be assessed merely in terms of counter-force, but also in terms of counter-value. As more and more people tend to find education and employment opportunities in major cities, any attack or threat to the livelihood of those people would be a blow to the ability of the national forces to defend those cities.

Security forces in Saudi Arabia must always be able to quickly mobilize, and destroy the ability of adversary states and powers to impose economic and naval embargoes against its ports, and/or its skies. The country is tied to international trade. The exports of oil and of other petrochemical products, as well as the imports of agricultural produce, machines, and medicine are vital to the country's well-being. Any attempts to disrupt such vital exchange should be anticipated. While such embargoes may not be successful given the breadth and depth of the country's shorelines, the embargoes must be handled with utmost urgency. While recent embargoes have not succeeded, the historical experience of the oil embargo against Iran's Mossadeq's government testifies to the need of anticipating and defeating such policies, even if this should lead to an outright war.

The country must also be wary of any major transformation of the military posture, that may affect the balance of forces in the region. The proliferation of

weapons of mass destruction in the region would also present a danger to the security of the country. Nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons, even if used as "a bomb in the basement" strategy would adversely effect the strategic interests of Saudi Arabia. This strategy would lead to similar nuclearization of other states, with the intended result of undermining the stability of all states in the region. Saudi Arabia subscribes to a the universal adherence to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) by all states in the region, including Israel; coupled with the establishment of a Nuclear Free Zone encompassing all states and adjoining waters in the Middle East, as prescribed in the UN General Assembly Resolution number 46/30 (6 October 1991), and as declared also in the Security Council Resolution 687 (1991), which considers in its preamble:

"Recalling the objective of establishment of a nuclear weapons-free zone in the region and the Middle East. Conscious of the threat which all weapons of mass destruction pose to peace and security in the area and the need to work towards the establishment in the Middle East of a zone free of such weapons". <sup>10</sup>

Thus, it is in the best of interests of Saudi Arabia to reaffirm the primacy of rules of international law and conduct, and to work assiduously for the establishment of a regional nuclear free-zone in the Middle East, which would encompass all the states in the region without exception. Further, Saudi Arabia should strive to limit the manufacture and transfers of weapons of mass destruction and the production of interballistic missiles in adversary states. Any attempts to by-pass the edict of international law in this regard, through the establishment of nuclear guarantees on a bilateral basis would be inimical to the future security of the country, since it would freeze an essentially unstable strategic imbalance.

#### 7.6 The Appropriate Response to Those Threats

Saudi Arabia, like other Arab Gulf states, continues to suffer from an inadequate supply of personnel to its armed forces. It has strove to increase the forces from approximately 66,000 soldier in 1990 to 102,000 in 1994, but its army is still small compared to the large armies of its neighbours. Today, the Saudi army

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> See the text of the UN Resolution 687, in Serge Sur, Security Council Resolution 687 of 3 April 1991 in the Gulf Affair: Problems of Restoring and Safeguarding Peace, UNIDIR Research Paper, No 12, Geneva: United Nations, 1992, Annex I.

represents approximately one fifth of that of Iran, one forth of that of Iraq, and one half of that of Israel.

Although its soldier to area ratio has increased by 40% since 1990, it is still smaller than that of other states in the region. It is even smaller than the ratio of other Gulf states (Table 7.1). Its soldier to citizen ratio is comparatively small also. As shown in Table 7.1, every Saudi citizen is defended by 6 per thousand of a soldier. In Israel, the ratio is 35 percent of a soldier for the defence of every civilian.

Given the fact that Saudi Arabia possesses no reserve system of military service, the difference in total soldier ratio per defence of a single mile is almost glaring. Even Kuwait with its reserve and active duty man force does almost four times better than Saudi Arabia in this category (Table 7.1). The need is therefore clear, considering the size and the population of Saudi Arabia, to require the adoption of a reserve system of military service. If such service were only to provide the ancillary medical, logistic, educational and administrative services required by a modern army, it is incumbent upon Saudi planners to consider such policy without delay.

Table 7.1: A Comparison of Regional Armed Forces,
Defence of Territories and Population

Country	Total Active Forces	Active Soldiers per Sq. Miles	Active & Reserve Soldiers per Sq. Miles	Active Soldiers per Citizen
Saudi Arabia	102,000	0.120	0.120	0.0063
Iran	528,000	0.830	1.380	0.0096
Iraq	382,500 Approximate	1.688	5.970	0.0210
Israel	175,000	22.430	77.564	0.0350
Egypt	410,000	1.062	2.620	0.0070
Yemen	63,500	0.300	0.480	0.0050

Country	Total Active Forces	Active Soldiers per Sq. Miles	Active & Reserve Soldiers per Sq. Miles	Active Soldiers per Citizen
Saudi Arabia	102,000	0.120	0.120	0.0063
Syria	408,000	5.700	11.300	0.0310
UAE	54,500	1.680	1.680	0.0310
Kuwait	11,700	1.760	4.550	0.0300
Oman	37,500	0.420	0.420	0.0200

Sources: IISS, The Military Balance 1992-93. London: IISS and Brassey's, 1992. And The World Alamanc and Book of Facts, 1993. New York: World Alamanc, 1993.

The human resource problem of the services can also be mitigated through the efficient utilization of all available labour in the country, namely women who represent half of the local population, and foreign workers who represent around 38% of the labour-pool.

Other Gulf states, such as the United Arab Emirates, have already opened up military academies for women to work in various para-military functions, and are almost too dependent on foreign manpower in their armies. Saudi Arabia could do well to motivate foreign workers to join the services, if those workers are highly trained and hail from Arab and Islamic countries. Those workers could perhaps even be rewarded with citizenship privileges, if they serve in the army for 12 years or longer of continuous service. In addition, Saudi Arabia must increase the intensive training and mobility of its forces, as well as the co-ordination among the services, in order to compensate the lack of adequate personnel in the active service. The quality of the soldier and his total grasp of the function and maintenance of his machine can only enhance his capability.

Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states could seek to expand the role of regional organizations which aim at predicting and limiting future crises and conflicts. There are already proposals to create a court of justice for the Islamic Conference. Other regional organizations, like the League of Arab States and the Gulf Cooperation Council, could be encouraged to follow suit. The latter organization

would do well in expanding its membership on an associative basis to other states in the Arabian Peninsula and the Arabian Gulf. Such a move would not only limit future threats, but also increase the flow of goods and services between those states, and create interlocking interests and loyalties, that could militate against any future adventurism.

Another aspect of responding to external threats is the ability of decision makers to manage foreign alliances in a way that ensures the flow of needed hardware, without injuring the ability of the civilian economy to maintain a good and reasonable growth ratio (3 to 4% annual growth rates). There are certain political and economic costs in any alliance framework, but those costs must be at all times kept reasonable and manageable.

#### 7.7 Summary and Conclusion

This paper has studied the underpinnings of the Saudi security system: area, Islam and oil. It has also noted the collapse of the old balance of power in the region, with all the manifest fluidity responsible for the unstable environment in the political and military milieu. The paper has also taken up the internal and external threats faced by the Kingdom. These include the ideological agitation, that seeks to undermine the unity of parts of the country and/or the sovereignty over the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah.

The paper's conclusion is that the country has no alternative, except that of increasing the size of the army directly, and indirectly through a reserve system of service. The paper looked into ways of bringing women and foreign workers in service, in order to provide adequate security to the country. Finally, the paper mentioned the need to rebuild a web of regional relations, and to manage external alliance frameworks in a way that will minimize costs and maximize benefits.

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