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ISRAEL CONFRONTS IRAN
RATIONALES, RESPONSES AND FALLOUTS

P R Kumaraswamy

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INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE STUDIES & ANALYSES

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To

My brother

With love, affection and admiration

Contents

INTRODUCTION*

Pray to God, but keep the gunpowder dry.

-Attributed to many

Obsession. This perhaps is the best way to depict the present Israeli policy towards the Islamic Republic of Iran.[1] The war of words between the two countries and intense speculations about an impending Israeli military strike against the Iranian nuclear facilities have emerged as the most anxiously followed developments in the Middle East. While the controversy over Iran's nuclear programme has dominated their ongoing political discourse, each acknowledges the other's regional importance and challenges. Once upon a time, both were the best of friends who, while being farthest apart in the region, shared similar worldview and threat perceptions.

Though they took time to mutate, these shifts have occurred primarily due to the transformation brought about by the 1979 Islamic revolution. Ayatollah Khomeini radically changed the nature of the Iranian society, Islamised its polity and in the process revolutionised the Iranian worldview.[2] He not only overthrew a despised monarchy but also ushered in a political order governed by religious laws and administered by theologians. The revolution emboldened the Iranian state and resulted in Tehran perceiving a

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* I am extremely grateful to my friend Professor Avraham Sela and the two anonymous referees for their critical and incisive comments on an earlier draft. All errors and omissions are mine.

1 The question of Iran has dominated the discussions and publications of all the premier think tanks in Israel, especially the BESA Center for Strategic Studies (Ramat Aviv), the Institute for National Security Studies (Tel Aviv) and the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs.

2 For example, see Karim Sadjadpour, *Reading Khamene'i: The World View of Iran's Most Powerful Leader*, (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2009), http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/sadjadpour_iran_final2.pdf

greater role for itself in the region; this time not as the 'policeman of the US' – as was the case during the later years of the Shah – but as a more assertive Islamic Republic. Its desire to champion Islamic causes well beyond its immediate borders gradually brought Iran into a direct confrontation with Israel.

For its part, Israel has never lost interest in Tehran. Iran's pro-Western disposition before the revolution, and its abiding regional importance, are factors that Israel could not ignore.[3] While the nature and intensity of their relationship have varied over time, Israel has rarely lost sight of Iran and its importance in regional politics. Even when its friendship with Tehran was warmer and the hostility less intense, Iran continued to be important for Israel. As would be discussed, this was true even before peripheral diplomacy became an integral part of its foreign policy in the mid-1950s. The Islamic revolution that ruptured the friendship did not immediately result in a transformation in the Israeli view of Iran and there were hopes that things could be salvaged and status quo ante restored.

As this study indicates, a few things went horribly wrong for Israel. For one, Iran was not ready to dilute, let alone abandon, the revolutionary purpose attached to its state; and second, Iran sought policies that put it directly at odds with Israel. In an ideal world, these should have resulted in Israel redefining its interests and priorities in the Middle East, especially vis-à-vis Iran. However, Israel was unable to overcome the nostalgia of the past bonhomie and evolve a cohesive policy on Iran. Moreover, it was also afraid of the cost of such a radical shift in its fundamental plank vis-à-vis Iran: the peripheral diplomacy. With the result, Iran soon became a nightmare for the Israeli foreign policy and security establishment. The nuclear controversy is just a recent addition.

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[3] For discussions on the bilateral relations, see Sohrab Sobhani, *The Pragmatic Entente: Israeli-Iranian Relations, 1948–1988* (New York: Praeger, 1989); Robert B Reppa, *Israel and Iran: Bilateral Relationships and Effect on the Indian Ocean Basin* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974); Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Iran, Israel and the United States* (Yale University Press, 2007).

This study examines Israel's changing perception of Iran and the underlying reasons for the current Israeli tension, anxiety, verbal acrimony and fears. In deconstructing Israel's fears vis-à-vis Iran, the study looks at its failures to revisit its erstwhile peripheral diplomacy and to make adequate changes. The first two sections look at Israel's relations with Iran, both before and after the 1979 Islamic revolutions. The next sections look at the basis of Israeli fears vis-à-vis Iran and the limitations within which Israel had to respond to its growing security concerns. The fifth section looks at Israel's political and military responses to these threats. The penultimate section looks at the growing importance of Israel and Iran to India and the complexities facing New Delhi in evolving a balanced policy towards these two countries. The final section offers certain policy options for India within the context of its desire to seek closer ties with both Israel and Iran. The study, however, is not a bilateral account of Israeli-Iranian relations nor does it seek to offer any counter narrative. The Iranian threat perception vis-à-vis Israel is important, but would require a different treatment. Thus, this study principally examines how Israel perceives threats from Iran, how it chooses to respond and the limitations of such an Israeli approach.

I. Past Bonhomie

In a number of ways Israel and Iran are identical. Unlike many other countries in the Middle East, both are ancient nations with rich cultural and civilizational histories. Both are diverse and multi-cultural in their unique ways. If the modern state of Israel is six decades old, the Islamic Republic is three decades old. Both share a strong sense of nationalism and ideological fervour that motivate their people to rally around their respective flags. In a way, both are ideological states that set them apart from many others. If one goes further, it is apparent that both wield considerable influence not only in their immediate neighbourhood but also in the wider Middle East. Both also have silent admirers in the region who want to emulate their successes and influences.

Not long ago, Israel and Iran were the best of friends, fellow partners in a US-dominated political order and maintained strong political, economic and strategic ties. Both are blessed with some of the key ingredients that make a regional power. Unlike many other countries, Iran enjoys the advantages of having a large territory, population, critical hydrocarbon reserves and, above all, a determined political leadership.[4] Israel on the contrary lacks most of the tangible assets that make up state power. Its territorial width is narrow, fragile with undecided and unrecognised borders and its population base is much smaller. Nevertheless, its robust security establishment, technological advancement, a determined political leadership unconcerned about political correctness and above all its close political ties with Washington significantly compensate these drawbacks. Its recognised military capability, especially in the missile and nuclear arena, complement these features.

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[4] Barry Rubin, "Iran: The Rise of a Regional Power", *MERIA Journal*, Vol.10, no.3, September 2006, http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2006/issue3/jv10no3a10.html

Links between the two date back to Cyrus the Great who, in 538 BC, freed the Hebrews from the Babylonians decades after the destruction of the First Temple. This historic and civilizational linkage figures prominently in discussions on contemporary relations between the two. In modern times, the Iranian role assumed international significance when in May 1947 it became a member of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) that was assigned the task of finding a solution to the Palestine issue after the impending end of the British Mandate. It was unable to support the majority suggestion for partition but at the same time could not endorse the Arab demand for a unitary state. Hence, Iran endorsed the Indian plan for a federal Palestine that granted greater internal autonomy to the Jewish population.[5] This plan, however, did not find favour in the UN, especially among the contending parties and on November 29, the General Assembly voted for the partition plan. Iran joined other Islamic countries in opposing this plan.

Israel initiated friendly overtures towards Tehran soon after its formation as it began to look for ways of countering Arab hostility and regional isolation. Its efforts culminated in *de facto* Iranian recognition of the Jewish State on March 6, 1950.[6] Though it was rarely publicised, Shah's Iran became the second Muslim country (after Turkey, which had established low-level diplomatic ties in late 1949) to recognise Israel. In July 1951, Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett admitted that Israel's relations "with Iran are very complicated ... and necessity should not be condemned."[7] A decade later, the Shah would depict this as the "true love that exists between two people outside of wedlock."[8] Israel's principal motive in establishing relations with Iran was to break the ring of Arab

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5 P. R. Kumaraswamy, *India's Israel Policy*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp.97-100

6 Uri Bialer, "The Iranian connections in Israel's foreign policy, 1948-1951", *Middle East Journal*, vol. 39, no. 2, 1985, pp.292-315.

7 Cited in Uri Bialer, "The Iranian Connection in Israel's Foreign Policy- 1948-1951", *Middle East Journal* (Washington) Vol. 39, No. 2, Spring 1985, p. 292

8 Gawdat Bahgat, "Iran and Israel: Prospects for Détente", in Bjorn Moller ed., *Oil and Water: Cooperative Security in the Persian Gulf* (London, 2001), p. 181

hostility around it, but there were also practical humanitarian considerations. Under the Shah the Jews were relatively better off and were well treated and hence Iran was not an area of concerns for the newly born Jewish State. There were contacts between the *yishuv* and the Iranian Jewish community during the Mandate years. However, Israel's concerns were focused on the neighbouring Iraq, where Jewish life had become untenable due to a wave of anti-Jewish violence. Iran thus became a conduit for the evacuation and immigration of scores of Iraqi Jews.

At the political level, Shah's fears of the Arabs contributed to a convergence of interests that intensified over time. The military coups that overthrew monarchies in distant Egypt (1952) and in nearby Iraq (1958) and challenges to his rule on behalf of the nationalist opposition leader Mossadegh unnerved the monarch. Gamal Abdul Nasser and his Arab nationalism were too radical for the Shah and this indirectly brought him within the ambit of Israeli political calculations. Both shared close friendship with the US, and at one time, Israel was a contender for membership of the US-backed military alliances such as the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO, earlier called the Baghdad Pact), which had Iran as a principal player. The Shah's friendship with Israel also had a larger function. According to David Menashri, the Iranian monarch "also seemed to believe that through his ties with Israel, Iran would benefit in Washington and gain the support of American Jewry, the Congress, the media, the business community and, of course, the administration."[9]

The June war and its negative regional responses resulted in the Shah publicly criticising Israel but clandestine relations endured and flourished. The prolonged Arab calls for economic boycott of Israel were accompanied by the Shah emerging as Israel's principal supplier of oil.[10] Military and security cooperation

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[9] David Menashri, "Iran, Israel and the Middle East conflict", in Efraim Karsh and P R Kumaraswamy, (eds.),*Islamic Attitudes to Israel*, (London: Routledge, 2008), p.109

[10] With hindsight, one could argue that the energy security guarantee provided by President Gerald Ford to Israel in September 1975 was more applicable to possible stoppage of Iranian oil than Sinai oil to Israel.

between the two flourished and Israel was even helping Iran in its missile programme.[11] There was close cooperation between the intelligence agencies of the two countries, especially in the training of SAVAK (the Iranian secret police). Ayatollah Khomeini and his Islamic revolution of 1979 radically and irreversibly changed the Israeli-Persian bonhomie.

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[11] Jonathan Marshall, Peter Dale Scott and Jane Hunter, *The Iran-Contra Connection: Secret Teams and Covert Operations in the Reagan Era* (Boston, Mass., 1987), p. 169.

II. Israel and the Islamic Revolution

The Islamic revolution was not the first threat that confronted Israel; but it was radically different from anything it had seen since 1948. Earlier it faced political, economic or ideological threats, but never an all-inclusive cocktail. The revolution that swept the Arab world in the 1950s and the emergence of republican regimes and popular Arab leaders severely threatened Israel. The growth of pan-Arabism, especially under Nasser and his support for Gaza-based fedayeen activities against Israel resulted in David Ben-Gurion joining hands with Britain and France to launch the Suez war in 1956 mainly to curb the popularity of the Egyptian leader. Nasser lost the military campaign but emerged as the most popular Arab leader transcending national boundaries. Likewise, the eve of the June war and the early stages of the 1973 war were equally challenging for Israel. However, through an effective mix of pre-emptive military strategy and political ties with countries and groups that were generally hostile towards the Arabs (mainly Shah's Iran and secular Turkey), Israel weathered the storm.

To a very large extent, Israel's existential threat had vanished following the 1956 Suez war. During the heydays of pan-Arabism, Middle East leaders bitterly fought against Israel. Their conflict, however, was political and Nasser never tried to employ Islam to delegitimise Israel. Various religious groups and movements tried that strategy but they never enjoyed state patronage. From the days of Gamal Nasser to Hosni Mubarak, most Arab leaders were fighting Israel externally and Islamists domestically. For long, mainstream Arab leaders lacked the required political clout and economic resources to severely threaten Israel. This changed following the October 1973 war. The oil-rich Arab countries of the Persian Gulf did promise a more conservative agenda that could undermine Israel. Led as they were by Saudi Arabia, however, these conservative Islamic states were far too close to Washington to make life difficult for Israel. Indeed, their ability to procure

modern arms from the US depended upon their success in working out a *modus vivendi* with the Jewish State. Thus, if the Republican states lacked the economic influence and ideological zeal of the Islamists, the oil-rich countries were not radical enough in their policy towards Israel. Therefore, the threats faced by Israel from the Arab states, Republicans or Monarchies, were severe but largely manageable.

Under the ayatollahs, Iran combines these deadly influences: political radicalism, Islamic zeal, military might and strong economic base. More than three decades after Ayatollah Khomeini touched down the tarmac in Tehran, Iran is still in a state of revolution. Moderates, reformers or conservatives are nomenclatures that have specific Iranian flavour.[12] None of these groups wants to dilute, let alone deviate from, the core values of the revolution. Every aspect of the Iranian society and polity is governed by the values set by Khomeini. The Iranian constitution is littered with commitments to the revolution and all the institutions of the state are tailored to reflect and carry forward its ethos. This permeates in every aspect of the society- from their culture to the treatment of minorities; from ownership of economic assets to the supremacy of the theologians over elected officials. The on-going power struggle between the Supreme Leader Ali Khamene'i and President Ahmadinejad is over who could be a better torchbearer of the revolution and its legacy.[13] Even reformists like former President Khatami and his Green Movement are not seeking any radical changes but only trying to work within the parameters of the revolution; it is more about liberalising trends than structural transformation.

This radicalism affects certain aspects of the Iranian foreign policy as well. The costly war with Iraq (1980-88), death of the founding leader (1989) and prolonged sanctions and isolation forced the post-

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[12] For a critical evaluation of Mousavi, the leader of the Green Movement, see, "Is Mousavi a Reformer?", *Middle East Quarterly*, 17:2, Spring 2010, pp.77-80.

[13] Ali Alfoneh, "Khamene'i's Balancing Act", *Middle East Quarterly*, vol.18, no.1, winter 2011, pp.73-77

Khomeini leadership to adopt a more pragmatic foreign policy. Through painstaking efforts initiated by President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989-1997), followed by Mohammed Khatami (1997-2005), Tehran reached out to the outside world, mended fences with its Arab neighbours and lessened tensions with Europe.[14] There were, however, two notable exceptions; Iran could not extend this pragmatism towards two powers that the founder of the Republic depicted as Satan: the US, the Big Satan and Israel, the Small Satan. The proximity of both these countries to the Shah, despised by Khomeini, has created a seemingly unbridgeable gap.

The failure of Washington to evolve an effective and cohesive policy towards Iran since 1979 is far too obvious. For its part, initially Israel was positively disposed towards the new regime in Tehran. Unlike its Arab policy, which revolves around conflict, Israel had closer political and strategic ties with Iran and the convergence on a number of issues brought them closer and consolidated Israel's peripheral diplomacy.[15]

When the Arab countries were imposing primary, secondary and even tertiary economic boycotts, Shah's Iran was exporting oil to the Jewish State. The continued presence of a sizeable Jewish community in Iran even after the revolution was a testimony to that historic bonhomie. Hence, even after the Islamic revolution

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[14] Contentious issues such as the Rushdie controversy were resolved after the death of Khomeini, when the Iranian leadership decided to sidestep the issues towards improving relations with Western Europe.

[15] Israel sought to overcome the hostility of its immediate neighbours by reaching out for alliances with the countries on the periphery of the region. A structural arrangement of this Alliance of the Periphery or Peripheral Diplomacy was Prime Minister Ben-Gurion's push for cooperation with Turkey in early 1950. However, signs of the peripheral doctrine were visible earlier. This was not an anti-Muslim alliance but rather thrived on anti-Arab feelings in the region and Israel sought to befriend countries and groups which had similar fears and hostility towards their Arab neighbours. At one level, Israel reached out to non-Arab powers in the region such as Iran and Turkey who had a troubled history shared with the Arabs. It also included non-Arab minority groups such as Maronite Christians in Lebanon and Kurdish Muslims in Iraq. Shared apprehension towards the wider Arab world became the common glue that united Israel and these countries and groups.

Israel continued to remain hopeful in forging closer ties with the new political order in Iran. In its view, revolution did not change geography nor did it make Iran a Sunni Arab state. Its active involvement in the Iran-Contra scandal in the 1980s was a testimony to this hope.[16]

As Israel was to learn gradually, and at considerable political costs, the Islamic Republic reached out to Israel's doorsteps and became its *de facto* neighbour.

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[16] Samuel Segev, *The Iranian Triangle: The Untold Story of Israel's Role in the Iran-Contra Affair*, (New York, Free Press, 1988);and Mansour Farhang, 'The Iran- Israel Connection', *Arab Studies Quarterly* (New York), Vol. 11, No. 1, Winter 1989, pp.85-98

III. Roots of the Israeli Fears

It is tempting to suggest the onset of the Islamic revolution as the reason and starting point for the deterioration of relations between Israel and Iran. The deterioration did not begin soon after and Israel did not feel threatened immediately. The closure of the hitherto unmarked Israeli mission in Tehran and handing over of that building to the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) were among the first moves of the new regime. On February 18, 1979, Yasser Arafat became the first foreign leader to meet Ayatollah Khomeini. Ideological and material support of the Iranian clergy facilitated the emergence of a more radical group in Lebanon, namely the Hezbollah. While the June 1982 Israel's invasion of Lebanon was the background, Tehran provided the patronage and support. If we add the prolonged anti-Israeli, anti-Zionist and even anti-Jewish rhetoric of Ayatollah Khomeini[17], the cocktail becomes complete: early 1979 is the perfect place to start.

The seeds of this hostility, however, took time to mutate. Like individuals, nations also do not always function with foresight. Israel was no exception. According to a RAND study, the cooperation between the two countries,

> ...did not even end after the Iranian revolution, despite the Islamic Republic's avowed ideological hostility toward Israel, as pragmatic interests and common enemies often triumph ideology. Iran continued to see Israel as a valuable counterweight to Ba'athist Iraq whereas Israeli leaders hoped that Iran would serve as a counterweight not only to Iraq but to the wider Arab world. Hence, pragmatic relations between Iran and Israel continued well into the 1980s, though on a much more limited scale. Nonetheless, cooperation stalled by the 1990s, and, by the following

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[17] Meir Litvak, "The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Holocaust: Anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism", *Journal of Israeli History*, vol. 25, no.1, March 2006, pp.267-8

> decade, the Israeli-Iranian rivalry emerged as a defining feature of the regional landscape.[18]

Thus, for long Israel was hopeful of reviving the past bonhomie. It was not a mere bystander in the Iran-Contra affair that rocked the Reagan Administration in the mid-1980s. It was egging on the US to pursue the arms-for-hostage deal towards securing Americans held by various Lebanese militias. The situation provided an opportunity for Israel not only to help its most reliable friend but also to make fresh overtures towards the clergy-run Iran. Its overtures towards Khomeini, sweetened with military supplies, were made despite all the negative signs. However, Tehran was not ready to tone down its rhetoric, reign in pro-Iranian armed groups in the region or to accept some semblance of normalcy in relations with Israel. The latter remained the 'Little Satan' that needed to be fought and destroyed.

Initially Israel did not give up Iran completely following Khomeini's return to Tehran. After the liberation of Kuwait, President Bill Clinton was seeking dual containment[19] of Iran and Iraq, but Israel was not an enthusiastic supporter of this policy. Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was confronted with two domestic rival pressures towards his approach to the Persian Gulf. One group consisting mainly, but not exclusively, of Israelis who had emigrated from Iraq such as the Police Minister Moshe Shahal, wanted Israel to befriend the weakened Saddam as a counter-weight to the revolutionary Iran.[20] Another group of Iranophiles were seeking a rapprochement with the ayatollahs, especially in the light

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[18] Dalia Dassa Kaye, Alireza Nader and Parisa Roshan, *Israel and Iran: A Dangerous Rivalry*, (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2011), p.9

[19] Martin Indyk et al, "Symposium on Dual Containment", *Middle East Policy*, 3: 1, 1994, pp.1-26

[20] According to one report, "During the summer of 1994, Israel launched contacts with the Iraqi government, culminating in secret negotiations in Rabat between two Israeli cabinet ministers (Housing Minister Ben Eliezer and Police Minister Moshe Shahal) and Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz in July." "Israel Reportedly Open Secret Negotiations with Iraq", *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, vol.1, no.12, December 1999, http://www.meforum.org/meib/articles/9912_me4.htm. See also, Ofra Bangio, "Crossing the Rubicon? Iraq and the Arab-Israeli Peace Process", *MERIA Journal*, vol.2, no.1, March 1998, http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/1998/issue1/jv2n1a5.html

of the scud attacks that Saddam launched against Israel during the Kuwait crisis. While neither of them succeeded in weaning Rabin in their direction, this tussle significantly diluted Israel's overall commitment to 'dual containment'.

This gradually transformed into visible and public Israeli hostility towards Iran. While there are serious internal differences over the approach, there is a near consensus inside Israel "about the severity of the Iranian challenge."[21] While the global agenda vis-à-vis Iran is relatively recent, as David Menashri reminds us, "Following the 1988 ceasefire in the Iran–Iraq War, and particularly after the 1991 Gulf War, Israel urged the world to keep the 'Iran issue' high on its agenda. The European policy of 'critical dialogue' and a possible softening of the American attitude alarmed Israel. It was also concerned about Iran's nuclear and long-range missile programme, which was perceived as a major strategic threat."[22] This got a boost when Iran adopted an anti-peace policy towards the Madrid process and its support for various militant groups in the region. "Prime Minister Rabin missed no opportunity to stress the 'Iranian danger', censuring Iran's 'dark regime' and described post-Khomeini Iran as 'Khomeinism without Khomeini'."[23] Both in public and in close door deliberations, various Israeli leaders have highlighted threats to Israel from Iran. In January 1993, Ephraim Sneh, a Labour Member of Knesset (MK) and a close confidant of Prime Minister Rabin, told the Knesset that "ideology, expansionism and armament" of Iran were the sources of threats facing Israel.[24] A RAND study identifies Sneh as the person who sensitised the public about the Iranian threat when the government was preoccupied with the Palestinians.[25] Since then, Iran has gradually come to

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21 Dalia Dassa Kaye, Alireza Nader and Parisa Roshan, *Israel and Iran: A Dangerous Rivalry*, (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2011), p.19

22 Quoted in David Menashri, "Iran, Israel and the Middle East conflict", in Efraim Karsh and P R Kumaraswamy, (eds.), *Islamic Attitudes to Israel* (London: Routledge, 2008) pp.115-16

23 Quoted in Menashri, Ibid, p.116

24 Ibid.,

25 Kaye et al, *Israel and Iran,* p.14

occupy a wider space within the Israeli security establishment, government and eventually public discourse.

There were other changes. By early 1990s, Iran was in a much better position militarily than before. The large-scale purge and desertion that followed the overthrow of the Shah did not result in the collapse of the Iranian state, as Iraq had hoped. Despite international isolation and acute shortage of weapons and spare parts, the Islamic Republic survived the Iraqi onslaught. Political, economic and military support that Saddam Hussein received from his Arab allies and western friends were insufficient to overrun the Islamic Republic. It is obvious in hindsight that external threats resulted in the stability and consolidation of the regime. With friendly assistance from countries like China[26] and North Korea[27], Iran was able to build its military capability, including missile systems. Post-Kuwait sanctions regime against Iraq only furthered the Iranian quest for regional influence and power. In the early 1990s the Persian Gulf region more or less looked like the pre-1979 security order supported by the US- the twin-pillar strategy.[28] This time, however, the other critical pillar-Iran, was a staunch adversary of the US.

A serious shift in Israel's attitude towards the Islamic republic witnessed since the early 1990s can be attributed to four closely linked processes, which undermined its strategic interests in the region. These are namely, Iranian support for radical militant movements such Hezbollah and Hamas and their fruition, the Iranian efforts to politically de-legitimise Israel and the controversy surrounding the Iranian nuclear programme. These have been complemented by the lack of cohesion in the American policy towards Tehran that resulted in an unchallenged rise of Iran. As the following narrative illustrates, through its support to Hezbollah

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[26] George L Simpson, "Russian and Chinese Support for Tehran: Iranian Reform and Stagnation", *Middle East Quarterly*, 17;2, Spring 2010, pp.63-72

[27] Christina Y Lin, "China and North Korea-Iran Nuclear Axis", *Asian Conflict Reports,* No. 12, July-August 2010, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/opedsPDFs/4c7bbfa542701.pdf

[28] Saudi Arabia was the other pillar of the US strategy towards the Persian Gulf.

in Lebanon and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, Iran has positioned itself as Israel's de facto neighbour.

Hezbollah

Whether or not the Iranian decision to create another militant Shi'a group in Lebanon was driven by its desire for a foothold closer to Israel is debatable. What is obvious, though, is that its role and support in the formation of Hezbollah had caused that group to emerge as the most successful resistance movement against Israel. By late 1970s, Amal, also backed by Ayatollah Khomeini, was unable to capitalise on the social grievances and demographic advantages of the Shi'a population in Lebanon.[29] It was useful to Khomeini when he was in exile fighting the Shah but was not radical enough once the clergy took over power in Tehran. Khomeini and his followers needed a radical group that would not only reflect the ethos of the Islamic revolution but also emerge as its torchbearer in other parts of the Middle East, especially in Shi'a dominated areas. It would also have to be loyal to the personality of Khomeini and propagate his ideas, especially the office of the *Vilayat-e Faqih* (Supreme Leader of Iran). It was not accidental that until the early 1990s, Hezbollah was committed to an Iran-type political order in the multi-religious and multi-cultural Lebanon.[30]

In the words of one scholar, "It was Iran's dispatch of 1,500 Revolutionary Guards (*Pasdaran*) to the Biqa valley in the wake of Israel's 1982 invasion that played a direct role in the genesis of Hezbollah."[31] The Israeli invasion enabled Iran "to organise the sundry resistance groups into a single organisational framework."[32]

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[29] Augustus Richard Norton, *Amal and the Shia: Struggle for the Soul of Lebanon*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987)

[30] A. Nizar Hamzeh, "Lebanon's Hezbollah: From Islamic revolution to parliamentary accommodation", *Third World Quarterly*, vol.14, no.2, 1993, pp.321-37

[31] Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, "Factors conducive to the politicisation of the Lebanese Shi'a and emergence of Hezbollah", *Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol.14, no.3, 2003, p. 303. There are suggestions that Iranian forces were in Lebanon as early as in April 1982, nearly two months prior to the Israeli invasion.

[32] Ibid

Estimates over the extent of Iranian support to Hezbollah range from 'at least US$100 million per year'[33] to "some $25-50 million in real-world terms" annually.[34] Another estimate puts the total Iranian financial contribution to Hezbollah "between one and two billion dollars as of July 2006."[35] Much of Hezbollah's arsenal of missiles of different types and ranges has been supplied by Iran. Some of its arsenal includes C-802 missiles that were supplied to Iran by China. Syria, the only Arab country that supported Iran during its war with Iraq in the 1980s, was helpful in this endeavour. Its geographic proximity enabled Iran to supply financial and military supplies to Hezbollah through Syrian territory or ports without undue outside scrutiny.[36]

The unilateral Israeli pullout from southern Lebanon completed on May 25, 2000 was a defining moment in the Middle East and for Iran. Israel's self-declared 'security zone' did not serve the intended purpose. Far from providing security to northern Israel, this option resulted in greater tension and violence along the Israel-Lebanon border.[37] Its partial withdrawal in 1985 to the security zone in order to manage the situation through the proxy South Lebanon Army (SLA) failed to provide security to northern Israel. The latter lost 256 soldiers in the Security Zone while another 840

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[33] David Makovsky, "Iran's hand in Lebanon", *San Diego Union Tribune*, July 23, 2006

[34] Antony H Cordesman, *Iran's support of the Hezbollah in Lebanon*. Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 15 July 2006

[35] Quoted in Moshe Yaalon, "The second Lebanon war: From territory to ideology", in Dore Gold (ed.), *Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas and the Global Jihad: A New Conflict Paradigm for the West*, (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs, 2007, p.17

[36] Logistic support to Iran-Hezbollah ties also bestowed additional advantages to Damascus. During its prolonged presence-turned-occupation of that country, Syria gained diplomatic advantage vis-à-vis Israel due to the growing power and influence of the Shi'a militant group. Indeed, by the 1990s various Israeli leaders were toying with the idea of ensuring Israeli security in the north through a peace agreement with Syria. In return for the Golan Heights, the tripartite agreement would result in Syria reining in Hezbollah and prevent its operations from southern Lebanon. The failure of these efforts resulted in the Israeli pullout from Lebanon in 2000.

[37] Since June 1982 Israel lost 1,216, including 546 who were killed after its partial pullout. For discussion on the Lebanese question see Avraham Sela, "Civil Society, the Military and National Security: The Case of Israel's Security Zone in Southern Lebanon", *Israel Studies*, vol.12, no.1, spring 2007, pp. 53-78

were injured during combat operations.[38] Periodic skirmishes inside and outside the security zone led to two full-fledged conflicts since 1982, namely, Operation Accountability (July 1993) and Operation Grapes of Wrath (April 1996). Both proved politically costly for Israel. The security zone was costly in human terms and ineffective in security terms. Moreover, the Israeli occupation also legitimised Hezbollah as a resistant movement. The unilateral move also revealed the absence of a negotiated way-out for Israel from southern Lebanon without a comprehensive peace agreement with Syria as well as Lebanon.[39]

The Israeli pullout highlighted the success of Hezbollah's military strategy, something the Arab states and leaders always wanted but could not accomplish. The October 1973 war was the last major Arab attempt to militarily regain the territories they had lost earlier. Nevertheless, Egypt eventually abandoned the military option and regained the Sinai Peninsula through the Camp David agreement. Similarly, recognising the futility, Yasser Arafat, in 1993 settled for the Oslo process towards regaining a truncated Palestinian state.

On the contrary, Hezbollah proved to be different and successful. Backed by Iran, the militant Shi'a group managed to inflict unacceptable losses on Israel and thereby forced it to withdraw from Arab lands. Hezbollah thus, became a model for the Palestinians, a cause of jubilation for the Arab masses and a wakeup call for the Arab rulers. It is possible to attribute the May 2000 success as one of the contributing factors for the outbreak of the al-Aqsa intifada in September that year following the failure of the Barak-Arafat-Clinton summit talks in Camp David. The success of Hezbollah also demonstrated the long-term results of sustained Iranian help in backing the movement. In hindsight, it would be appropriate to view Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon as the most

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[38] For a discussion see, Gal Luft, "Israel's Security Zone in Lebanon: A Tragedy?", *Middle East Quarterly*, vol.7, no.3, September 2000, pp.13-20.

[39] This option receded when Hafiz al-Assad shifted his focus towards securing the presidency within the family by grooming his son Basher as his successor. To tide over possible domestic opposition to his succession plan, Hafiz gave up peace with Israel.

visible manifestation of the downward slide of the Israeli-Iranian relations.[40] Israel could no longer ignore the strategic reach of Iran.

However, the crucial nature of the Iranian support to Hezbollah manifested itself during the Second Lebanon war in the summer of 2006 when its help enabled the Lebanese military group to sustain and survive the 34-day Israeli military campaign. Some even suggest that Iran was a party to Hezbollah's decision to kidnap the soldiers that resulted in a full-fledged war[41] and trace the roots of the War to the 1979 Islamic revolution.[42] Others have attributed Israel's immediate decision for a full-scale offensive to Iran being "one of the targets of Israel's war on Hezbollah, if not the main target, and that Israel and the United States were waiting for a suitable opportunity to deprive Iran of one of its major sources of power by weakening one of its main 'allies' in the region."[43] According to some, "Iran's goals in the Lebanon theatre go well beyond destroying Israel" to "achieve regional hegemony."[44] During the war, as many as 4,228 missiles fired by Hezbollah were identified as having been Iran-supplied.[45] The most spectacular moment came on July 15, when Chinese-made-Iranian-supplied C-802 anti-ship missile struck *INS Hanit* off the coast of Beirut, resulting in the death of four Israeli sailors and severe damage to the corvette.[46]

The Lebanese militant group not only survived Israel's relentless air campaign over 34-days, but also succeeded in inflicting considerable

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40 While the withdrawal was forced by the Israeli civil society, Hezbollah claimed credit for the Israeli pullout and portrayed it as a victory for its resistance.

41 For a discussion on this see, Nevine Mossaad, "The Israeli war on Lebanon: The Iranian connection", *Contemporary Arab Affairs, vol.1, no.2,* April 2008, p.260.

42 Moshe Yaalon, "The second Lebanon war: From territory to ideology", in Dore Gold (ed.), *Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas and the Global Jihad: A New Conflict Paradigm for the West*, (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs, 2007, p.16

43 Mossaad, "The Israeli war on Lebanon", p.258

44 Yaalon, "The second Lebanon war", p.16

45 Citied in Yaalon, Ibid., p.15

46 Yitzhak Shichor, "Reconciliation: Israel's Prime Minister in Beijing, *China Brief* Vol. 7, no. 2, May 9, 2007, http://www.jamestown.org/programmes/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=4025&tx_ttnews[backPid]=197&no_cache=1

damage to Israeli deterrence capabilities. If one excludes the 1991 Scud attacks, this was the first time Israel's home front had become the battleground since 1948. During the war, over 4,000 missiles were fired at Israel, resulting in 165 deaths, including 44 civilians, and about 700 were injured.[47] Some of these missiles reached as far as Hadera, about 50 kilometres from the Israel-Lebanon border.[48] Hezbollah leaders threatened that their missiles could even reach the coastal city of Tel Aviv. Close to half a million Israeli residents in the north were forced to flee their homes and take temporary refuge among their friends and relatives in central and southern Israel.[49] When the US-mediated ceasefire came into force on August 14, 2006, Israel failed to achieve its military objective of securing the release of the two kidnapped soldiers but the war had also exposed the inadequacies of the Israeli military strategy against militant groups such as Hezbollah.[50]

Hezbollah's "success" in withstanding the relentless Israeli air campaign led to groundswell support for the movement and the Shi'a leader, Hasan Nasrallah (General Secretary of the movement) became the most popular personality for the Sunni Arab masses.[51] In the words of one Iranian cleric, Hezbollah had ''smashed the

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47 There were equally severe damages to the Shi'a-dominated southern Lebanon. Eighty per cent of villages suffered damages including the near-destruction of seven of them with 19,000 deaths and 32,000 wounded. Quoted in Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, "Factors conducive to the politicization of the Lebanese Shi'a and emergence of Hezbollah", *Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol.14, no.3, 2003, p. 300.

48 According to one estimate "92 rockets landed in Haifa (32 in inhabited areas), seven in Afula, six in Beit Shean, two in Tirat HaCarmel, two near Hadera, and one near Zikhron Yaakov. Two rockets landed in (West Bank). By way of comparison, the Kiryat Shmona area was hit by 1,102 rockets, Nahariya – 808, Maalot – 642, and Tzfat – 471 rockets."Noam Ophir, "Look not to the Skies: The IAF vs. Surface-to-Surface Rocket Launchers", *Strategic Assessment*, vol.9, no.3, November 2006, http://www.inss.org.il/publications.php?cat=21&incat=&read=86

49 "Middle East crisis: Facts and Figures", *BBC News*, August 31, 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/5257128.stm, accessed on February 14, 2012

50 Israel obtained the body parts of the two soldiers through a similar swap arrangement with Hezbollah in July 2008.

51 Emily B Landau, "Reactions in the Arab World: Blurring the Traditional Lines", *Strategic Assessment*, vol.9, no.2, August 2006, http://www.inss.org.il/publications.php?cat=21&incat=&read=106. At the same time, since the Second Lebanon War, the militant group has been extremely cautious in dealing with Israel and refrained from any provocative moves.

myth of [Israeli] invincibility" and he depicted the militant movement as "a source of pride for the world of Islam."[52] The popular support was so overwhelming that even the Saudi King Abdullah, who had initially chided the movement for its 'adventurism'[53] had to retract and rally around the 'resistance' against Israel.[54] Though Lebanon paid a very heavy price, the war emboldened Hezbollah and contributed to its popularity among the Palestinians. The kidnapping of Israeli soldiers by Hezbollah was duplicated by Hamas, which abducted Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit from a military stronghold along the Israel-Gaza border. Despite prolonged military campaign and airstrike, Israel could eventually secure Shalit's release in October 2011 only through a massive swap involving over 1,000 Palestinian prisoners, most of who were held on terror-related charges.[55] The magnitude of the threat compelled some to describe the Second Lebanon War as the First Israeli-Iranian War.[56]

Another long Iranian investment came on the Palestinian front where its support for radicalism paid dividends, though at a much lower level than in Lebanon.

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52 Bill Samii, "Iran playing key role in Israel-Lebanon crisis", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Newsline*, July 18, 2006. http://www.rferl.org/newsline/2006/07/5-NOT/not-180706.asp, accessed on December 20, 2006

53 Walid Choucair, "Saudis attribute offensive to Hezbollah's rogue 'adventure'", *The Daily Star* (Beirut), July 15, 2006

54 According to WikiLeaks cable, reflecting the official mood, within days after the outbreak of hostilities, "Wahhabi Sheikh Abdullah bin Jabreen issued an advisory opinion, reported as a fatwa declaring it impermissible for Muslims to support Hezbollah in any manner, including through prayers." "Conservative Saudi clerics Debate support for Hezbollah ", July 30, 2006, http://www.wikileaks.ch/cable/2006/07/06RIYADH6038.html# See also, "Website Reports Lebanon Crisis Causing Split in the SAG", *WikiLeaks Cable*, August 14, 2006, http://www.wikileaks.ch/cable/2006/08/06RIYADH6477.html#

55 For details, see "Israel-Hamas Prisoner Exchange List, 11 October 2011", *MEI Factsheet*, No. 10, 18 October 2011, http://mei.org.in/front/cms/resourcesDetail.php?id=MzA2

56 Dore Gold, "Introduction" in Dore Gold (ed.), *Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas and the Global Jihad: A New Conflict Paradigm for the West*, (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs, 2007, p.8. Such portrayal reflects the eagerness of certain circles, especially in the Right side of the political spectrum, to present Iran as an existential threat to Israel.

Hamas

Discussing the relations between the Islamic Republic and Palestinian militant movement Hamas, Hillel Frisch divides them into three phases.[57] In the late 1980s, they were 'marginal, principally because Iran's attention was focused elsewhere.' The second phase began with the Kuwait crisis and the subsequent US policy of dual containment. Despite a host of developments such as the Madrid conference, Israeli deportation of Hamas activists to Lebanon (December 1992), the Oslo process, and its political expulsion from Jordan (1999), Hamas was "still a minor world player". Hence, "Iran found it far more worthwhile to invest in Hezbollah, located in post-Taif agreement Lebanon, rather than Hamas." The real shift, in his view, occurred following American-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003. This and the 2006 electoral victory demonstrated that Hamas "could help Iran become the power behind the proxies in its quest for regional hegemony." Similar hopes upon Hezbollah, in his view, did not materialise because the Lebanese group failed to "adroitly [play] its cards right."[58]

Though important, the Iranian support for Hamas was only a part of its larger support for the Palestinians and had affected Israel. Like other Arab and Islamic countries of the world, the Islamic Republic was also supportive of the Palestinians. On February 18, 1979, PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat became the first foreign leader to met Ayatollah Khomeini after the revolution and since then Iranian support has been reserved for the more radical segment of the Palestinians. During that meeting, Khomeini criticised the PLO for its secular nationalist, pan-Arab agenda and urged Arafat to emulate the principles of the Islamic Republic.[59] As they drifted apart, both leaders never met again.

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57 Hillel Frisch, *The Iran-Hamas Alliance: Threat and Folly*, BESA Perspectives Paper no. 28, (Ramat Gan: BESA Center for Strategic Studies), May 1, 2007, http://www.biu.ac.il/Besa/perspectives28.html, accessed on February 10, 2012

58 Ibid

59 Rachel Brandenburg, "Iran and the Palestinians", *The Iran Primer* (Washington, Dc, USIP, nd), http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/iran-and-palestinians, accessed on February 10, 2012

Arafat's willingness to abandon the armed struggle did not go down well with the Iranian leadership. His acceptance of the two-state solution through the November 1988 Palestinian declaration of statehood was seen as a betrayal of the Palestinian cause. In 1989, the Supreme Leader Ali Khamene'i, who succeeded Khomeini, called Arafat a "traitor and idiot."[60] Indeed, Arafat's next visit to Iran did not happen until 1997 when Tehran hosted the summit meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Countries.[61] As Hamas-led suicide attacks against Israeli civilians intensified, Arafat and other Palestinian officials openly held Iran responsible for the violence.[62] The alienation of mainstream Fatah-led PLO from Iran was aptly captured by the remarks of a Hamas activist. Recollecting the golden times, in 1998 the Hamas leader told *Sharq al-Awsat*:

> Who began the relationship with Iran? Arafat and the PLO began the relationship. They were the ones who benefitted from it in the days of Ayatollah Khomeini. Iran closed the Israeli Embassy and set up a Palestinian Embassy instead. Iran also strongly defended Jerusalem. Then the Palestine Authority came and abandoned Jerusalem and Palestine. This was where the dispute occurred. Isn't this the real situation? The dispute occurred because Iran adhered to what you, Arafat called for within the PLO. Then you abandoned this policy line and joined the enemy camp.[63]

In short, while the Islamic Republic continued to maintain its policy of rejection, the PLO abandoned its armed struggle and surrendered to the 'enemies' of Islam.

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60 Ibid

61 Ibid, In June 2011, with the same OIC acronym the organisation was renamed as Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

62 Some see the capture of Karina A in 2002 loaded with arms suspected to be heading for the Gaza Strip as an Iranian overtures towards the once-despised Palestinian Authority that sought co-existence with the Jewish State. Brandenburg, "Iran and the Palestinians".

63 Interview of Abu-Muhammad Mustafa, *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* (London), November 8, 1998, FBIS-NES

This resulted in the Iranian support gravitating from the mainstream Fatah-PLO combine to the Islamic Hamas movement, which it found to be more in tune with the revolutionary Islamic ideology. Naturally, Iran was quick to welcome the victory of Hamas in the January 2006 Palestinian elections, calling it "a huge victory for the Palestinian people."[64] As one observer put it, "...the shift in power from Fatah to Hamas was seen in Israel not only as a radicalisation of Palestinian society, but also as the encroachment of Iran closer to Israeli borders."[65] At the same time, when Hamas began contemplating moderation, Iranian support moved to the hardliners within the movement.[66] For example, in February 2012, Iran hosted the Prime Minister of the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip, Ismail Haniya within days after the Doha Declaration[67] between the Palestinian President Abbas and the exiled Hamas leader Khalid Masha'al. The deal brokered by Qatar pledged both sides to work towards unity; though committed to the unity objective, the Hamas faction led by Haniya had reservations over the agreement and its implications over the peace talks with Israel. Thus, Iran supported Arafat when he was pursuing armed struggle against Israel; then Hamas when it was more radical than the PLO; and finally, the Haniya faction, which was less inclined towards accommodation with Israel. Despite the vicissitudes in its dealings with Hamas, Iran had also patronised another Palestinian militant group, the Islamic Jihad.

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64 "Analyst discusses relations between Iran and Hamas", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, January 27, 2006, http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/01/175FA8CE-21E8-4A2F-A586-133BC1FC90D2.html, accessed on May 20, 2006

65 Yossi Mekelberg, "Israel and Iran: From War of Words to Words of War?", *Chatham House Briefing Paper* no. 1, March 2007,p.1

66 Shlomo Brom, "The Storm within Hamas", *INSS Insight*, No.316, February 28, 2012, http://www.inss.org.il/publications.php?cat=21&incat=&read=6146 and Yoram Schweitzer and Shlomo Brom, "The Mashal Pronouncement on Popular Struggle: Revolutionary Indeed?", *INSS Insight*, No. 308, January 4, 2012, http://www.inss.org.il/publications.php?cat=21&incat=&read=5898

67 For the text of the Doha Declaration, see *Gulf Times* (Doha), February 7, 2012, http://www.gulf-times.com/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=485127&version=1&template_id=36&parent_id=16.

A far more serious manifestation of the Iranian support came in the form of the Islamisation of the Palestinian issue. Iran was not the first one to do so.[68] In 1920, shortly after the Balfour Declaration, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Husseini Islamised the problem to consolidate his position to fight the two challenges he faced—the Jewish immigration and the unfriendly British Mandate administration. Unlike the past, however, the Iranian efforts came when mainstream Palestinians were moving towards a political settlement with the Jewish State. Highlighting the Iranian contribution to the problem, Menashri suggests, "Iran's Islamic arguments have put the Arab–Israeli conflict on a totally different footing – a religious crusade as opposed to a political-national conflict."[69] The roots of Iranian hostility lie in its "revolutionary dogma" while pragmatic considerations and policy preference differences "did not find public expression." Therefore, Iran's rejection of Israel's right to exist "was unequivocal and uncompromising."[70] Denying Israel's right to exist, thus, became Iran's policy and even a religious mission. According to him, Iran views the Arab-Israeli conflict-

> ...as involving two diametrically opposed powers – a struggle between righteousness (*haq*) and falsehood (*batel*), between which compromise was impossible. It was, therefore, the religious duty (*taklif shar'i*) of all Muslims to confront it. Neither the 'betrayal' nor 'treachery' of the Arab and Palestinian leaders who negotiated peace with Israel, nor the recognition by the international community could provide Israel with any legitimacy. In this regard, the Iranian position was much closer to that of the Islamist movements (such as Hamas and Hezbollah) than that of the Arab nationalists in the 1960s and the 1970s.[71]

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[68] This is also true for the Arab countries but the difference lies in the intensity of using this paradigm in their domestic and foreign polices.

[69] Menashri, "Iran, Israel and the Middle East conflict", p.108

[70] Ibid, p.109

[71] Ibid, p.110

Thus, the Iranian support for Palestine is rooted in the traditional Islamic view of minorities and their political status and rights.

Fourteen centuries after Prophet Mohammed, Dhimmi remains the only framework through which the Islamists see, treat and judge the religious other.[72] The Iranian constitution is an epitome of this patronising attitude towards the non-Muslims. The establishment of Israel defied the traditional Islamic benevolence towards the Jews. Bestowing recognition upon Israel, for an Islamist, means accepting Jews as equals and granting the erstwhile-protected people the sovereign right to rule themselves, that too on a land which is considered an Islamic property or *waqf*. It is within this wider Islamic context that one must locate the closer proximity and convergence between the Sunni Hamas group and the Shi'a Islamic Republic. Like Iran, the Palestinian militant group also considers Mandate Palestine to be an Islamic property that can never be partitioned or placed under non-Islamic rule or sovereignty.[73]

The first visible manifestation of the Islamisation process came in August 1979, when Ayatollah Khomeini called on Muslims the world over, to commemorate the last Friday of the month of Ramadan as Al-Quds Day (Jerusalem Day) in support of the 'Muslim people of Palestine.' Since then al-Quds Day celebrations have been marked by many Islamic countries and among Muslim communities. The largest such congregations are held in Iran, which are marked by anti-Israeli rallies, demonstrations, rhetorical statements and other such activities. The anniversary of the Islamic Revolution has also been used to articulate this anti-Israeli anger. In one such rally in February 2012, the Prime Minister of Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip Ismail Haniya publicly declared, "They want us

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[72] P. R. Kumaraswamy, "Islam and minorities: Need for a liberal framework", *Mediterranean Quarterly*, vol.18, no.3, summer 2007, 94-109.

[73] For example, Article 11 of the Hamas Charter of 1988 depicts "...land of Palestine is an Islamic Waqf consecrated for future Moslem generations until Judgement Day." For the complete Charter see, *The Avalon Project of Yale University*, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hamas.asp.

to recognise the Israeli occupation and cease resistance but, as the representative of the Palestinian people and in the name of all the world's freedom seekers, I am announcing from Azadi Square in Tehran that we will never recognise Israel."[74]

A far more serious threat to Israel has come from various Iranian efforts at de-legitimisation of Jewish history, culture and political rights. This is more lethal politically than its support for various militant groups.

De-legitimisation of Israel

Since 1979, opposition to Israel has emerged as a major plank through which Iran has perceived the outside world and pursued its policy. An accommodation with 'the Big Satan', the US, is possible because the differences are largely political, but in the case of Israel, the issues are theological and deep-rooted. Thus, Iran has been trying to delegitimise Israel in the eyes of the world, especially among Islamic countries and societies. At the international level, it has questioned Israel's credentials at the UN, something the Arab states abandoned following the Madrid conference. At a more substantial level, it has expressed its disapproval of Israel's right to exist through Islamic idioms and phrases. For example, it played a significant role in the resurrection of the racism charge against Zionism during the 2001 Durban conference against racism.[75] The Iranian representative in Geneva, Ali Khorram, was the head of the crucial Drafting Committee that re-introduced the racism agenda that was buried by the UN

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[74] "Haniya assures Iran: Hamas will never recognize Israel", Middle East Online, February 11, 2012, http://middle-east-online.com/ENGLISH/?id=50571, accessed on February 13, 2012. Indeed some suggest that the Gulf States have warned Haniya from undertaking this trip "due to tense relations" that exist between them and Tehran. "Gulf states warn Hamas PM not to visit Iran", *The Jewish Press*, February 8, 2012, http://www.jewishpress.com/news/breaking-news/gulf-states-warn-hamas-pm-not-to-visit-iran/2012/02/08/, accessed on February 13, 2012

[75] For more details on this, see *Report of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, 31 August 2001-8 September 2001*. http://www.unhchr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/e06a5300f90fa023802566870051 8ca4/cb95dc2388024cc7c1256b4f005369cb/$FILE/N0221543.pdf.

in December 1991.[76] The theatrics of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad during the Geneva meeting in April 2009 to discuss the progress made since First Durban Conference of 2001 forced the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to bluntly observe: "I deplore the use of this platform by the Iranian President to accuse, divide and even incite. This is the opposite of what this conference seeks to achieve."[77]

Furthermore, the post-Shah Iran has emerged as the main producer and distributor of various anti-Semitic works of literature, especially *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.[78] This trend has grown significantly following the electoral victory in June 2005 of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. He has been making various statements denying the Holocaust and under his leadership, Iran has been hosting a number of events 'commemorating' the non-existence of mass killing of the Jews by Hitler's Germany. The nation that provided refuge to the Jews following the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BC, has emerged as the nerve centre for modern anti-Semitism. Though prevalent since 1979, such trends were subdued and less vocal when Khatami was President. Under Ahmadinejad, it has become a major plank for Iran's foreign policy agenda. As Iranian scholar Karim Sadjadpour succinctly put it: "The reform- minded Mohammed Khatami (1997–2005) upstaged Khamene'i from the left with his hopeful calls for a 'dialogue of civilisations,' while former Tehran mayor Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005–present) has out-flanked him from the right with his diatribes against Israel and Holocaust revisionism."[79]

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[76] On November 10, 1975, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 3379 that described Zionism as "a form of racism and discrimination." This Resolution was formally annulled on December 16, 1991, shortly after the Madrid Middle East peace conference.

[77] *Statement by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon on the remarks by the President of Iran at the Durban review conference, April 20, 2009*, http://www.un.org/sg/statements/index.asp?nid=3797, accessed on February 14, 2012

[78] For a historic discussion, see Bernard Lewis, *Semites and Anti-Semites*: *An Inquiry in Conflict and Prejudice*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986).

[79] Sadjadpour, *Reading Khamene'i:*,p.1,

This ironically is in contrast to noticeable changes in the Arab attitude towards Jews in general.[80] Changes in Arab perception are neither uniform nor popular and often evoke rebukes and protests. Yet at least following the September 11 attacks on the US, a number of Arab countries have initiated institutional dialogues between Islam and other major religions. Such officially sponsored meetings also included Judaism. Countries like Qatar have hosted Jews from Israel and outside to such officially sponsored inter-faith dialogues, meetings and exchanges. Some of these have been held in the Arab countries; but given their sensitive nature, Saudi Arabia has held such dialogues outside its territory. Such efforts and contacts have enabled some Arab leaders to gingerly move towards distancing themselves from anti-Semitism. [81]

The Islamic Republic, however, has moved in the opposite direction. Not every Iranian is in agreement with Ahmadinejad's frenzy and some of the leading Iranians like former President Mohammed Khatami have openly disagreed with Ahmadinejad.[82] Admitting the "suffering of the Jews at the hands of the Nazis", some Iranians have accused Israel of 'exaggerating' the suffering and 'taking advantage' of that history "to neutralise any opposition to their diabolical plots."[83]

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[80] While Arab anti-Semitism has not disappeared, there are alternate views. For example, see, Nazir Mgally, "Denying the denial is not enough", *Ha'aretz*, December 20, 2006.

[81] The statement of Azzam al-Tamimi, Director of London-based Institute of Islamic Political Thought reflect the growing recognition even among the extremist voices. He advised Hamas and its ilk: "... denying the Holocaust is unwise, because it did happen.... I distinguish between denying the Holocaust and between [claiming] that it is used to oppress another people. I don't want to minimize its scale. That is not the issue. Like Finkelstein, said in his famous book *The Holocaust Industry*, Zionism uses the Holocaust to justify the crimes committed by Israel. ... if we say that, there won't be any problem, but if we deny that the Holocaust happened, there will be a problem. I once heard a guest on Al-Aqsa TV denying the Holocaust. This is a problem." *MEMRI Special Dispatch*, Report. 4597, March 22, 2012, http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/0/6210.htm

[82] "Iran's former president challenges Ahmadinejad over Holocaust-'We should speak out even if a single Jew is killed', *The Daily Star* (Beirut), March 2, 2006

[83] Hossein Amiri, "Lies of the Holocaust industry", *Tehran Times*, January 26, 2005. Interestingly at this time, the relatively moderate Khatami was the President.

Nonetheless, there are a number of incidents and development that underscore the anti-Jewish sentiments of the Islamic Republic. The earliest known anti-Israeli statement of Khomeini dates back to 1963 when he charged that 'Israel does not wish' the Qur'an, the 'ulema', or any single learned man 'to exist in this country.'[84] This trend has continued since the revolution. Reflecting the mood of the Hamas and Islamic jihad, in 1996, the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i asked whether Palestine could "be wiped from the world's map and replaced with a fabricated and false state by the name of Israel?"[85] Even a relatively moderate leader like Khatami was not ready to accept the Palestinian recognition of the Jewish State. Speaking during the OIC summit that he hosted in December 1997, he observed, "...the hegemonic, racist, aggressive and violent nature" of Israel is manifested in its "systematic and gross violation of international law, pursuit of state terrorism and development of weapons of mass destruction, seriously threatens peace and security in the region."[86]

As a part of his reform agenda, and in his bid to reach out to the outside world, in September 1998 President Khatami advocated 'Dialogue among Civilisations'. This also came in response to the negative stereotypes about Islam and Muslims following the September 11 attacks and the need to refurbish Iran's own image in the West and in the neighbourhood.[87] Despite its claims of reaching out to other cultures of civilizations, Khatami's overtures were not inclusive. They did not include, for instance, any dialogue with Jews, Judaism or Israel. They remained a no-go area even for a reformist like Khatami.

Moreover, Iran blamed Israel for the 2006 Danish cartoons that outraged Muslims all over the world. According to Khamene'i

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[84] Quoted in Menashri, "Iran, Israel and the Middle East conflict", p.110

[85] October 1996 statement quoted in Menashri, "Iran, Israel and the Middle East conflict", p.110

[86] Quoted in Ibid. p.110

[87] This was aimed at countering the Clash of Civilization articulated by Samuel Huntington. But, if there can be civilisational dialogues, can one rule out civilisational conflict?

the cartoons were a "conspiracy by Zionists who were angry because of the victory of Hamas."[88] Accusing Israel of using the Holocaust as a pretext for "genocide" against the Palestinians, Ahmadinejad observed in October 2007, "They have made the Holocaust sacred and do not allow anyone to ask questions. Under the pretext of the Holocaust they are allowed to commit whatever crime they like."[89] The Holocaust denials by President Ahmadinejad might result in western displeasure and rebuke, but they enjoy considerable support within Iran. Hence, it is difficult to ignore them merely as maverick incidents.

The prevalent Iranian hatred against Israel at times spills over to its domestic Jewish population. The size of the community, which was estimated at 90,000 on the eve of the revolution, has dwindled considerably. Unofficial estimates suggest that there are only about 20-30,000 Jews in Iran.[90] The one-member representation given to the community in the Majlis as a recognised religious minority does not convey the real picture. Though such a presentation is generous when one looks at the size of the Jewish community, it has certain inbuilt limitations that confront the religious minorities in Iran.[91] In the immediate aftermath of the Islamic revolution, the community faced severe hardships due to Islamic radicalism. There were widespread arrests, intimidation and even execution on charges of spying for the 'Zionist enemy'.

At times, Iran has also justified its mistreatment of the Baha'is by highlighting the 'Zionist angle.' The location of the international headquarters of the Baha'i movement in Mt Carmel near Haifa has been used as the justification to persecute 'Israeli spies.'[92] In

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88 "Cartoons 'part of Zionist plot'", *The Guardian*, February 7, 2006, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/feb/07/muhammadcartoons, accessed on February 14, 2012

89 "Ahmadinejad deplores use of Holocaust to punish Palestinians", *The Daily Star* (Beirut), October 6, 2007

90 US, Department of State, *Religious Freedom Report 2011, Iran*, http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/171734.pdf

91 For a larger discussion, see Eliz Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000).

92 Egyptian officials also offer similar rationale to justify their ill-treatment of Baha'i citizens.

May 2008, for example, eight Baha'is 'confessed' to the Iranian authorities to the setting up of an illegal organisation that took 'orders' from Israel.[93] Interestingly the origins of the Baha'i headquarters in Acre dates back to the 1850s when it was a part of the Ottoman Empire, long before the establishment of the State of Israel.

Besides these, Israel perceives a serious threat from the Iranian nuclear programme and many of the ongoing Israeli threats emanate from the perceived nuclear threat.

Nuclear threat

Israel sees a far more serious threat in Iran's suspected nuclear programme and enrichment ambitions. Both within and outside the region, Israel's nuclear capability is well recognised and even its most ardent detractors do not suspect Israel's nuclear potential.[94] Conceived primarily as a deterrent against possible annihilation, the nuclear option has provided Israel a sense of confidence, military superiority and even strategic domination in the regional affairs. Unlike India, it has not invoked moral considerations to reject the non-proliferation regime but cites strong security rationale for not signing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Extending the logic further, it has refused to accept the idea of the Middle East as a nuclear free zone. The prolonged refusal of the Arab countries to accept and recognise its existence has hardened Israel's nuclear posture. If in the past, the nuclear option was rationalised as a survival strategy, in the post-Madrid phase it is being seen as a guarantor of peace agreements with the Arabs.

While its underlying explanations have varied over time, Israel's basic nuclear premise remains the same: nuclear monopoly in the

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[93] Yoav Stern, "Iran: Baha'is confessed to taking orders from Israel", *Ha'aretz*, August 4, 2008; see also, Reuters, "Iran postpones trial of 7 Baha'is accused of spying for Israel", *Ha'aretz*, August 17, 2009. http://www.haaretz.com/news/iran-postpones-trial-of-7-baha-is-accused-of-spying-for-israel-1.282152

[94] For a comprehensive study, see Avner Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999)

region.[95] Through effective political and military means, Israel was able to throttle various Arab efforts to challenge its nuclear supremacy. If military means were used against Iraq (June 7, 1981) and Syria (September 6, 2007), political pressure through the US prevented Egypt from treading the nuclear path. Seen within this wider context, a successful weaponisation programme by Iran would undoubtedly challenge the prolonged Israeli nuclear monopoly and thereby undermine its security interests.

The prevailing international debate on the Iranian nuclear programme is partisan and highly skewed. Driven by strong political considerations, many have cautioned of an impending nuclear Iran while others have cast doubts over various politically motivated intelligence assessments.[96] For their part, Iran and its leaders have underlined the apparently peaceful nature of their nuclear programme and that nuclear weapons are not only against the interest of Iran but are also unislamic. As a voluntary signatory to the NPT, Iran is entitled to peaceful uses of nuclear energy and on this front, the NPT and its depositories have not fulfilled their part of the obligations. Above all, prior to the Iraqi invasion, the US had claimed to present 'irrefutable' evidence against Iraqi pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and these were subsequently proved to be hallow and inaccurate. Hence, intelligence assessments regarding an Iranian nuclear programme evoke scepticism instead of approval.

In the midst of information and misinformation overflow, certain things are notably clear. Since 2002 Iran's nuclear ambition has come under considerable scrutiny, disbelief, criticism and even international sanctions. Even its political friends are not ready to share the Iranian position on the nuclear issue. Following growing concerns over its clandestine nuclear activities on December 18, 2003, Iran entered into an additional protocol with the IAEA.

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[95] This is at times, referred to as Begin Doctrine.

[96] For a recent discussion, see S Samuel C Rajiv, *Iran's Nuclear Imbroglio at the Crossroads: Policy Options for India*, *IDSA Occasional Paper No. 26*, (New Delhi: IDSA, 2012), http://www.idsa.in/occasionalpapers/IransNuclearImbroglio_SSamuelCRajiv (accessed August 6, 2012).

This strategy partly reflected the non-confrontationist nature of the Khatami presidency. These voluntary measures were partly aimed at warding off further pressure from the international nuclear watchdog.

While these measures worked for a while, in September 2005, Iran was accused of noncompliance of its commitments and obligations to the NPT and IAEA. Since then there has been a protracted political tussle between Iran and the international community. The confrontationist posture adopted by Iran vis-à-vis the outside world over the nuclear issue coincided with the election of Ahmadinejad a few weeks before the first IAEA vote in September 2005.

Between September 2005 and December 2011, the IAEA adopted four resolutions[97] against Iran and during the same period, the UN Security Council adopted seven resolutions[98] on the nuclear issue. With the exception of the first IAEA resolution, China and Russia supported all the other resolutions that were sceptical of the peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear programme. Opposing the use of force to resolve the issue, both China and Russia have urged for a negotiated settlement for the nuclear impasse. At the same time, they have joined hands with the US and its western allies in imposing targeted sanctions against Iranian individuals and institutions suspected of being associated with its nuclear programme. While Iran's rights under the NPT for the peaceful uses of nuclear energy are not in doubt, a number of its actions and statements are not in tandem with its professed peaceful intentions. This is reflected in the eleven resolutions by the IAEA and the UNSC between September 2005 and July 2012. The international community has spent considerable political and diplomatic capital in seeking a diplomatic solution but the nuclear talks held in Istanbul (April 2012), Baghdad (May 2012) and Moscow

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97 The IAEA adopted resolutions against Iran on September 24, 2005, February 04, 2006, November 27, 2009 and November 18, 2011.

98 They are UNSC Resolution 1696(July 31, 2006), UNSC Resolution 1737(December 23, 2006), UNSC Resolution 1747 (March 24, 2007), UNSC 1803 (March 03, 2008), UNSC Resolution 1835 (September 27, 2008), UNSC Resolution 1929 (June 09, 2010), UNSC Resolution 1984 (June 09, 2011).

(June 2012) have also proved to be inconclusive. Even countries that seek a negotiated diplomatic solution have been unable to bring about an end to this nuclear impasse.

Though important, Iranian assertions of its peaceful intentions should not be exaggerated. Driven by larger strategic interests, nations tend to be economical with truth. For long, many countries, including India, denied the possession of chemical weapons but upon the conclusion of the Chemical Weapons Convention they pledged to destroy the stockpile, which until then they had denied possessing. Both India and Pakistan denied weaponisation of their nuclear programmes until the May 1998 nuclear tests. Hence, excessive reliance on Iranian profession of peaceful intent would not be sensible. Nations are political animals; they are driven by vested interests and not moral righteousness.

Furthermore, Iran lives in a nuclear neighbourhood. Besides Israel and Pakistan, it is surrounded by countries where the US is physically present or active such as Afghanistan, Iraq, central Asia or the Persian Gulf. The limited application of the non-proliferation norm is also a lesson for Iran. Despite initial condemnations and sanctions, the US eventually came around to recognise India's nuclear status and was prepared to cooperate in augmenting its civilian nuclear energy capabilities. Similarly, it offered economic incentives to North Korea following its nuclear test. At the same, a non-nuclear Iraq faced a US-led invasion that wrecked the country beyond repair. Nuclear option therefore, is a rational choice for Iran if it were to prevent any US-led invasion.[99] Suspicions over Iranian nuclear ambitions have also raised fears of a nuclear race in the Middle East with countries such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt potentially open to treading a similar path.

Thus, while the timeframe remains debatable, it is widely believed in Israel that Iran is pursuing a weaponisation programme and is capable of producing fissile materials sufficient for a crude bomb. If

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[99] For a persuasive argument, see, Kenneth N Waltz, "Why Iran Should Get the Bomb?", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 91, No.4, July-August 2012, http://www.foreignaffairs.com/issues/2012/91/4 (accessed August 7, 2012).

successful, it will undermine Israel's interest in a number of ways: one, it will challenge and eliminate Israel's nuclear monopoly; two, it will spur a nuclear arms race thereby undermining the strategic advantage it has enjoyed by denying an Arab nuclear option; and three, a nuclear Iran will embolden its allies in the region, such as the Hezbollah, which will further erode Israel's security.

Iran's verbal rhetoric against Israel has at times escalated into actual violence. The Islamic Republic is held responsible for the March 1992 bombing of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, which killed 29 people, including four Israelis. Two years later, in July 1994 the Jewish community centre in the same city was bombed resulting in the killing of 85 persons and wounding of 330 people. Both were conducted by Hezbollah, apparently with Iranian support. A spate of terror attempts against Israel in Bangkok, New Delhi and Tbilisi in February 2012 were also attributed to elements within Iran. To these, one must one add Iran-supported militant groups, Islamic Jihad, Hamas and Hezbollah, that have also pursued a violent strategy against Israel.

Iran remains an ideological state committed to delegitimisation of Israel. There are no signs of the dilution of its ideology-based hostility towards Israel. Pragmatic trends that are visible in Iran's relations with others countries have not percolated into Israel. This also fits into the state-backed anti-Americanism that is still dominant in Iran. Its energy resources provide Iran with considerable political and economic leeway with some of the major powers of the world.[100] All these make Iran a formidable threat to Israel. How does it cope?

Before we answer that question it is essential to examine the limitations faced by Israel in pursuing an effective strategy vis-à-vis these perceived threats.

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[100] According to a recent CRS study, "Iran's petroleum sector generates about 20% of Iran's GDP (which is about $870 billion), 80% of its exports, and 60% - 70% of its government Revenue."Kenneth Katzman, *Iran Sanctions*, *CRS Reports*, February 10, 2012, P.1. http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS20871.pdf.

IV. Israel's Drawbacks

It is essential to recognise that anti-Israeli positions and statements of Iran do not operate in a vacuum but are a reflection of and responses to Israeli policies. Regional warmth towards Israel following the historic handshake in Washington disappeared very quickly and Oslo became a process by itself rather than a roadmap to peace. Nearly two decade later, peaceful resolution remains as elusive and Palestinian statehood has become entangled in a maze of conditions and rising expectations. There are apprehensions of another popular uprising due to unfulfilled Palestinian aspirations. If terrorism is a disincentive for Israeli concessions, its absence removes any sense of urgency on Israel's part. Hence, if the Oslo process is dead, the Middle East remains without an alternative approach to solving the Israeli-Palestinian problem. The popularity of Hamas has to be located not in the growth of extremism among the Palestinians but primarily in the failure of the moderate Palestinian Authority to live up to its commitments on statehood.

A number of countries, which moved closer to Israel, have returned to their pre-Oslo positions. After a gap of two years in October 2012, Jordan named its new envoy to Israel. The Gulf countries, which at one time appeared to be moving faster towards Israel than the Palestinians, have scaled down their contacts. The UN votes on crucial issues have highlighted the limited support enjoyed by Israel. More Arab and non-Arab countries have increased their contacts with Hamas as it has emerged a key player.[101] Even Israel was forced to accommodate the demands of Hamas to secure the release of the kidnapped soldier Gilad Shalit.[102]

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[101] Since 2006 countries such as China, Qatar, Russia and Turkey have hosted Hamas leaders.

[102] Yoram Schweitzer, "A Mixed Blessing: Israel, Hamas and the Recent Prisoner Exchange", *Strategic Assessment* (Tel Aviv), Vol.14, no.4, January 2012, http://www.inss.org.il/upload/%28FILE%291329720803.pdf

While its contributions to these developments were not substantial, the Islamic Republic has benefitted immensely from the negative regional environment towards Israel. Hence, parts of the threats emanating from Iran lies in Israel's inability to adopt a policy that has wider regional acceptance.

Second, there is a general international indifference towards Israeli concerns vis-à-vis Iran. With the sole exception of the US, most western countries have dismissed such threats and periodically counselled the US, and by extension Israel, to pursue a negotiated settlement over all pending issues between Iran and the outside world. Driven by its desire to take other major powers on board, Washington settled for a watered down resolution in the UNSC, whose principal outcome was political isolation of Iran. These measures were important but ineffective. While its Iran-directed domestic legislations were more effective[103] , the US was unwilling to displease its friends and partners whose support it needs on various other international issues.[104] The periodic anti-Semitic statements from various Iranian leaders evoked western criticism, condemnation and ridicule but no effective response.

Indeed, the European differences with Israel over Iran should not be surprising.[105] For long, both sides have been indulging in a dialogue of the deaf. Israeli demands for a European support over threats it faces from Iran were accompanied by its apathy towards the EU's concerns for the Palestinians. Unlike the US, the EU was not prepared to give extra leeway to Israel over the Iran issue. Hence, for long Israel and EU were talking at cross-purpose, each ignoring uneasy and uncomfortable with issues critical to the other.

Lastly, for over three decades after Khomeini's return to Tehran, the US had not evolved a cohesive and workable strategy towards

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[103] The most effective of these sanctions are those by the US under the Iran Sanctions Act. For details, see Kenneth Katzman, *Iran Sanctions, CRS Reports*, February 10, 2012, P.1. http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS20871.pdf.

[104] This was true especially of China whose veto the US sought to avoid while seeking UNSC sanctions against Iran.

[105] However, for a sympathetic treatment, see Sharon Pardo and Joel Peters, *Uneasy Neighbours: Israel and the European Union*, (Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2010).

Iran. Different Presidents have oscillated from friendly overtures to hostile responses.[106] Initially, containment dominated the thinking in Washington. It was also the Cold War era and containing the ayatollahs was in accord with Reagan's hostility towards the 'Evil Soviet Empire'. This was reflected in the American support for the Iraqi aggression against Iran. The eight-year war proved costly and futile and Saddam Hussein could not deliver what some had hoped for- a decisive victory over the ayatollahs. Then the US came up with Dual Containment, whereby Washington would simultaneously limit the power and influence of both Iran and Iraq. During the 1990s, situations in the Gulf were still under control but mostly not due to American actions. Disarmed and even dismembered (no fly zone was in place over Kurdish areas in the north), Iraq still posed a threat to its security; Iran used this window to build its military capabilities. The Iran-specific American sanctions such as Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA) and others were in place but this did not prevent even American allies from investing in the Iranian oil industry. According to a July 2008 CRS Report, between 1999 and 2007 over US$27 billion was invested in the Iranian energy sector by various companies including from the west.[107] During this period, President Clinton was also sending feelers to Tehran indicating his willingness to bury the past and make a new opening.[108] However, these were half-hearted moves, which offered no inducements for Iran to change its course, especially over issues critical to the US such as the Middle East peace process.[109]

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[106] For a comprehensive treatment, see Kenneth Pollak, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America*, (New York, NY Random House, 2004).

[107] Kenneth Katzman, *The Iran Sanctions Act(ISA), CRS Report*, July 23, 2008, p.6

[108] On June 17, 1998, for example, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright called on Iran to join the US in drawing up "a road map leading to normal relations." Barbara Crossette, "Albright, in Overture to Iran, Seeks A 'Road Map' to Amity", *New York Times*, June 18, 1998, http://www.nytimes.com/1998/06/18/world/albright-in-overture-to-iran-seeks-a-road-map-to-amity.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm

[109] Mahdi Ahouie, 'The Middle East Peace Process from the perspective of Revolutionary Iran: Will Tehran ever take part?' *Iran Analysis Quarterly* (MIT-Boston), Vol.1, No. 4, Fall 2004, http://web.mit.edu/ISG/iaqfall04ahouie.htm (accessed August 24, 2012)

The September 11 attacks changed many things for the worse. The conservative worldview of President George W. Bush and domestic pressures for swift retribution for the largest terrorist attack on American soil proved to be a deadly combination. While al-Qaida leader Osama bin-Laden, who claimed responsibility for the attacks, was holed up in the mountains of Afghanistan, Bush added Iraq to his target.[110] Perhaps without much consideration he also came up with his 'Axis of Evil' theory during his January 2002 State of the Union Address, which clubbed Iran with Iraq and North Korea.[111]

The American decision to invade Iraq in March 2003 proved to be a blessing in disguise for Iran. President Bush fulfilled Iran's long-term complaint against Saddam Hussein, the person who launched an aggression that led to thousands of Iranian deaths. The Iraqi ruler was toppled, hounded and eventually executed. The departure of the strong ruler was followed by that country plunging into a sectarian divide and civil war, thereby enabling Iran to increase its influence among the majority Shi'a population who were politically marginalised under Saddam Hussein. This ground reality forced even the bi-partisan Iraq Study Group to suggest active western diplomatic engagement with Iran "without preconditions."[112] The American introduction of democracy and multi-party elections transformed Iraq into the first Shi'a Arab country in the Middle East. The US also undermined another threat that confronted Iran in the East, namely, Taliban in Afghanistan. Before anyone could recognise, a Shi'a crescent[113] was emerging in the region,

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[110] Bob Woodward, *The Plan of Attack*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004)

[111] For the text of his January 29, 2002, speech see, httphttp://edition.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/01/29/bush.speech.txt/

[112] James A Baker and Lee H Hamilton, *Iraq Study Group*, (Washington. DC: USIP, 2006), p.36, http://media.usip.org/reports/iraq_study_group_report.pdf. Indeed, a couple of years earlier another think-tank came out with *Iran: Time for a New Approach*, *Report of an Independent Task Force Sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations*, July 2004, www.cfr.org/content/publications/attachments/Iran_TF.pdf

[113] Despite the obvious limitations and fallacies, this idea cannot be dismissed easily and at times Sunni Arab leaders also use this concept to explain and justify their fears vis-à-vis Iran.

encompassing the Shi'a majority but Sunni ruled Bahrain, Iraq, Beka valley in Lebanon, Alawite-ruled Syria and Iran. If the US was the unintended architect of this Shi'a crescent, Iran became its prime beneficiary.[114]

Thus, the indecisive and unclear American policy towards the Islamic Republic since 1979 and international reluctance to seriously consider its concerns contributed to a heightened Israeli desire for unilateralism. Despite the radical rhetoric from Khomeini and his followers, or perhaps because of it, Israel has sought to renew its ties with the new regime. The overtures and efforts in the 1980s and early 1990s were an indication of its desire to continue with its peripheral diplomacy. Indeed, already surrounded by hostile and unfriendly neighbours, Israel did not have the luxury of making new enemies. Nevertheless, that was exactly what had happened in the end.

How did Israel cope with the threats from Iran? Broadly Israel had two options; political accommodation with the Islamic Republic or politico-diplomatic strategy to mitigate the Iranian threats. As would be discussed, it opted for the third option, coercive measures.

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[114] Ironically, the converse is also true. The deployment of American forces in both Afghanistan and Iraq by 2003 posed a serious threat to Iran and partly explains the expedited Iranian efforts to develop a nuclear option.

V. Israeli Responses

The Islamic Republic has not diminished Iran's importance either in the region or for Israel. On the contrary, the Islamic nature of the new rulers underscored the need for Israel to reach out to the ayatollahs if it were to normalise relations with the wider Islamic world. A degree of normalcy with the most radical regime could have dented some of the theology-based opposition to Israel. The ideal response would have been Israel seeking a *modus vivendi* with the new rulers who deposed the Shah. Its involvement in the Iran-Contra Affair was partly an exercise in that direction. Partly for this reason, during the 1980s and early 1990s, Israel did not flag Iran as its primary threat, as it did in subsequent years. Iran seemed a manageable threat. Even when the tension escalated, there have been voices in Israel that emphasised the need for a friendlier and more accommodative approach towards Iran. Israel's renowned Iran expert, David Menashri[115] as well as former head of the Mossad, Efraim Halevy[116] have often underscored the need for Israel to tone down its rhetoric and pursue dialogue with Tehran to resolve mutual differences. There are similar calls by the peace camp in Israel. Iran's continued relevance and importance, and the political costs of a hostile policy form their rationale. Such voices are important and provide an opportunity to reflect on the anti-Iran policy[117] pursued by various Israeli governments since the early 1990s.

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[115] David Menashri, "US, Israel and Iran should Cool the Rhetoric", *CNN*, February 16, 2012, http://edition.cnn.com/2012/02/16/opinion/menashri-iran-israel/index.html

[116] Yoav Zitun, " 'Iran far from Posing Existential Threat' *Ynet*, April 11, 2011, http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4143909,00.html

[117] Laura Rosen, "Israel Pulls Plug on Iran Regime Change Shop", *Foreign Policy*, May 25, 2009, http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/05/25/israel_pulls_plug_on_iran_regime_change_shop

Accommodation with Iran, however, proved to be problematic. Those favouring dialogue with Iran do not have influential partners within the Israeli establishment. Such sober voices are a minority in Israel where the majority prefers coercive diplomacy and other means to resolve the issue. Dialogue with Iran is not the favoured option, especially when much of the Israeli society has moved to the Right since its disappointments with the Oslo process and its peace dividends.[118] More Israeli civilians were killed after the 1993 historic handshake on the White House Lawns than before. If one excludes the Centrist Kadima, the peace camp in Israel today is a fraction of what it was when Prime Minister Rabin pushed for peace with the Palestinians.[119] Furthermore, there are no signs of moderation among the Iranian society. As highlighted by the anti-Israeli worldview, rhetoric and actions, when it comes to Israel there is no 'peace camp' inside Iran. As Menashri, an ardent critic of the official Israeli approach towards the Islamic Republic admits:

> One major area in which Iran's policy remained excessively uncompromising was its inherent hostility to Israel. In the view of the Islamic regime, Israel remained the enemy of Iran and Islam, and a threat to mankind. The revolutionary goal was unequivocal: 'Israel should be eliminated' (*Isra'il bayad mahv shavad*). 'Death to Israel' thus remained a central theme in Iran's revolutionary politics.[120]

The 'initial signs of change' were frustrated by the beginning of the conservative offensive in the spring of 2000 and things have only deteriorated since Ahmadinejad became President in 2005. Thus, a political settlement of the dispute through an Israeli-Iranian negotiation and accommodation remains elusive. That would require a fundamental

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[118] Efraim Inbar, "The Need to Block a Nuclear Iran", *MERIA Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 1 March 2006, http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2006/issue1/jv10no1a7.html

[119] In 1992 the Israeli Left represented by Labour and Meretz secured 56 seats in the 120-member Knesset. Since then their combined strength has been dwindling; they got 43 seats in 1996; 36 in 1999; 25 in 2003; 24 in 2006; and 16 in 2009. Indeed, the Labour party, which governed Israel for nearly three decades received only 13 seats in 2009 and was reduced to being the fourth largest party in the Knesset.

[120] Menashri, "Iran, Israel and the Middle East conflict", p.108

transformation in Iran and its abandonment of its theology-based revolutionary rhetoric against Israel; there are no signs of that in the near future.

This leaves us with the second possibility: politico-diplomatic strategy whereby Israel re-examines its traditional prism through which it looks at Iran—the peripheral alliance.

Into its seventh decade, Israel's view of the region has not changed radically and its contours of peripheral diplomacy still remain in place. Evolved in the mid-1950s this policy primarily sees the Arab neighbourhood as the immediate threat. While the existential threat has disappeared from public discourse and security threats have diminished, the Arab countries continue to dominate Israel's strategic calculations. The Oslo process and the euphoria of the 1990s have not altered its traditional assessment. There have been signs of improvements but no radical transformation. A series of diplomatic contacts and low-level Arab representation in Israel in the 1990s were insufficient to transform into a reappraisal of peripheral vision whereby Israel could view the Arab countries as its strategic partners. Indeed, the immediate severance of low-level ties by countries such as Morocco, Tunisia, Qatar, Oman and Mauritania following the outbreak of the al-Aqsa intifada forced Israel to conclude that these Arab countries would not be able to follow an autonomous policy towards the Jewish State.

Since there were no paradigmatic changes in its view of the region, the emergence of Iran as its new threat was not compensated by Israel finding new friends and allies in the region.[121] A reversal of the peripheral doctrine would have enabled Israel to re-focus Iran as a new threat and in the process re-orient its foreign policy. If Arabs were the threat that Israel and Iran sought to contain through cooperation, Iranian threat since the 1990s should have brought Israel closer to the Arabs in containing Tehran. Within the same Arab-Persian divide, Israel could have found an ally in the former

[121] In recent years, Israel's relations with former allies like Egypt, Jordan and Turkey have strained over bilateral problems and the peace process.

to face the mutual threat from Iran. In the 1950s and 1960s, it sided with the Shah of Iran to confront the challenge posed by Nasser and his brand of pan-Arabism. In the present context, a re-defined peripheral diplomacy would have meant siding with the Arab rulers, especially those in the Persian Gulf, to confront the radicalism of the Islamic Republic. The peace plan initiated by the then Crown Prince and now King Abdullah, inter alia, offered a conditional but comprehensive peace to Israel.[122] Due to a host of difficulties, of the plan and in the region, the Abdullah plan remains yet another missed opportunity. Israel is still not ready to make the transition that would enable its acceptance and accommodation within the wider Arab and Islamic world. Either the price for it is too heavy or it finds regional accommodation unattractive. Hence, while there have been innumerable political visits and contacts with the Arab countries in the Gulf, Israel is yet to see them as partners in peace. A shift in its traditional view of the region would have brought Israel closer to those countries who feel equally threatened by the rise of Iran.

While the Arab world is not as dogmatic as before, the Palestinian issue enjoys widespread resonance among the Arab masses. No Arab ruler-monarch or republican-could afford to disregard this. As some Israeli leaders, especially President Shimon Peres, have been highlighting, the differences between Israel and the Palestinians are smaller and bridgeable but the trust deficit has widened considerably since the failed July 2000 Camp David talks. A re-orientation of the peripheral alliance however, would have been viable had the peace process been fruitful and conclusive. There are no signs of that happening anytime soon. Since the hasty departure of Tunisian President Ben-Ali in January 2011, the region and its principal players have been pre-occupied with the Arab Spring and their own survival. The Palestinian issue is not their immediate priority, more so when the Fatah-Hamas divide remains wider than ever. Reduction in terrorist violence has also

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[122] For a critical assessment see Joshua Teitelbaum, *The Arab Peace Initiative: A Premier and Future Prospects* (Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 2009), http://www.jcpa.org/text/Arab-Peace-Initiative.pdf; see also Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, "Arabs vs. the Abdullah Plan", *Middle East Quarterly*, vol.17, no.3, summer 2010, pp.3-12.

resulted in an Israeli disinterest to push for peace. President Barack Obama's preoccupation with his re-election bid resulted in 2012 being a no show year.

A re-orientation of Israel's view of the peripheral alliance would demand a fundamental change in its view of the world. Israel has not fully understood and internalised the fallout of the end of the Cold War. While its desire for closer ties with the US is natural, it strongly believes in the continuation of the US hegemony and domination. Its prolonged political differences with Europe have not led to any re-assessment of its identity. The economic crisis facing the EU and the resultant weakening of their international influence have not led to Israel questioning its western identity. Changing global economic and hence, political shifts towards Asia is not fully reflected in its worldview.[123] Israel still considers itself a part of the weakened and increasingly marginalising West. Public opinions in important Asian countries such as China and India are not linked to Christianity or Judeo-Christian heritage. On the contrary, they also have a strong domestic Muslim constituency that favours Arabs and Palestinians.[124] Israel's inability to see the Arab countries as partners is part of the larger problem of its identity.

Thus, Israel is left to confront Iran on its own, at least in the regional context. Devoid of an effective politico-diplomatic strategy, it settled for a militant approach to the Iranian threats, especially to the nuclear controversy. This approach partly explains the trigger-happy public posturing of some of its leaders, especially Defence Minister Ehud Barak.[125] Directly or indirectly, a number

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[123] Despite growing economic relations with Asia, Israel's worldview is still dominated by its western orientation.

[124] P. R. Kumaraswamy, "Indian Muslims and 3Js: Jews, Jerusalem and Jewish State", in Moshe Maoz (ed.) *Muslim Attitudes to Jews and Israel,* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press), pp.215-29

[125] For a discussion on what Barak calls 'Zone of immunity', see Amos Yadlin et al, "Between the 'Zone of Immunity' and 'Zone of Trust': US-Israeli relations in light of Iran's Continuing Nuclearization", *INSS Insight*, No. 320, March 8, 2012, http://www.inss.org.il/publications.php?cat=21&incat=&read=6197.

of sabotage actions against the Iranian nuclear programme are attributed to Israel. It is blamed for the murder of five Iranian nuclear scientists since 2010.[126] The Stunxnet virus, which struck Natanz nuclear plant in the summer of 2010, was developed by the US-Israel.[127] Likewise, Israel was also blamed for 'a mysterious explosion' in an Iranian missile base in November 2011 that killed at least 17 people including a senior commander.[128]

Furthermore, based on his interactions with Barak and other senior Israeli officials, Ronen Bergman came to a frightening conclusion: "... Israel will indeed strike Iran in 2012."[129] This was soon followed by comments by senior American officials that Israel had not taken a decision on Iran. By seeking to escalate the confrontation with Iran, Israel has forced the international community, especially the US, to pay more attention to the threats posed by Iran and its nuclear programme.[130] Regardless of the political problems and

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126 Among others, see Yossi Melman, "Iran Scientist Likely Killed by Opponents of Nuclear Programme", *Ha'aretz*, January 13, 2010; http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/analysis-iran-scientist-likely-killed-by-opponents-of-nuclear-program-1.265658, accessed on August 6, 2012; Karl Vick and Aaron J Klein, "Who Assassinated an Iranian Nuclear Scientist? Israel Isn't Telling", Time, January 13, 2012, http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2104372,00.html#ixzz22kGyoHbb, accessed August 6, 2012; and "Iranians 'confess' to nuclear scientist murders on state television", *The Guardian*, August 6, 2012, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/aug/06/iranians-confess-nuclear-scientist-murders (accessed Aug 7, 2012).

127 Lawrence Conway, "Obama ordered cyber-attacks on Iran's nuclear programme but created a super-virus that is now 'out of control'" *Daily Mail* (London) June 1, 2012, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2153308/Cyberattacks-Iran-ordered-Obama-created-virus-creating-havoc-internet.html#ixzz22kEzye2m, accessed on August 6, 2012

128 Karl Vick, "Was Israel Behind a Deadly Explosion at an Iranian Missile Base?" *Time*, November 13, 2011, http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2099376,00.html

129 Ronen Bergman, "Will Israel attack Iran?", *The New York Time*s, January 25, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/29/magazine/will-israel-attack-iran.html?_r=2&pagewanted=all, accessed on February 14, 2012

130 Speaking at a Washington Institute for Near East Peace Conference in May 2012, Dennis Ross aptly summed up this by saying: ""With Osirak in 1981, did Israel talk about it? Or in 2007 about the Syrian reactor? Why are the Israelis talking now? To create motivation for the rest of the world," *Ha'aretz*, May 6, 2012, http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/dennis-ross-israeli-leaders-talk-about-iran-nuclear-threat-to-motivate-the-world-to-act-1.428571 (access August 6, 2012)

logistical limitations, an Israeli military strike against Iranian nuclear installation/s cannot be completely ruled out. Do nations always act in a rational manner? Are political leaders always guided only by cost-benefit analysis? Did President George W. Bush think of an exit strategy before invading Iraq? Hence, it would be naïve to rule out a military option. As President Obama repeated in his 2012 State of the Union address that he "will take no options off the table to achieve that goal."[131]

Whether such a course is necessary or not, the Israeli threat has worked considerably. The fear that a military solution to the crisis would have unforeseen consequences for the region and the world, has forced many countries to act. Israel can take indirect credit for scores of resolutions against Iran adopted by the UN Security Council and the IAEA. As reflected by their stand in both these bodies, even China and Russia have developed differences with Iran over its nuclear posture. The expansion and intensification of the US sanctions on Iran are due to consistent Israeli complaints, pressures and threats. The same holds true for the EU decision in January 2012 to cease oil imports from Iran from July. As energy exports account for bulk of its GDP and foreign exchange earnings, reducing oil markets for Iran has emerged as the principal western strategy. For achieving this goal, India and others are being pressurised by the West to reduce their oil imports from Tehran.[132]

Israel's persistent, and at times coercive, diplomacy over Iran were largely instrumental in this. By repeatedly focusing on Iran and its nuclear programme, it has managed to overcome the limitations imposed by lack of allies and friends in the Middle East. Indeed, due to fears over a possible Israeli military strike and its ramifications, a number of Arab countries have been privately

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131 *Remarks of the President in the State of the Union address, January 24, 2012*, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/01/24/remarks-president-state-union-address, accessed on February 14, 2012

132 P. R. Kumaraswamy, "India Defies Oil Sanctions on Iran", *BESA Perspectives*, (BESA Center, Ramat Aviv) No. 168, March 19, 2012, http://www.biu.ac.il/SOC/besa/docs/perspectives168.pdf

pressurising the US to act swiftly lest the region is engulfed in a major turmoil. The WikiLeaks cables are treasure-troves chronicling Arab fears over Israeli-Iranian military confrontation. Through its brinkmanship, direct and indirect warnings of a military strike and threats of escalation, Israel has been able to sensitise a number of countries, who otherwise were indifferent towards the issue. By adopting an aggressive posture, it has conveyed its seriousness and in the process compelled the West, especially the US, to pursue a more aggressive strategy vis-à-vis Iran. Expansion of anti-Iranian sanctions by the US and the EU decision to stop energy imports from Iran were outcomes of these measures. Hence, unless the issue is resolved peacefully or by other means resulting in a non-nuclear Iran, Israel's pressures and demands upon the international community would continue and even intensify.

A few of Israel's strategic moves are also directly linked to the Iranian threat. On January 17, 2008, for example, Israel carried out a missile test, believed to be Jericho III, with a capacity to carry over 1,000 kg conventional and non-conventional warhead and estimated range of 4,800 km.[133] This was supposed to be a response to the Shihab range of missiles that Iran has been developing in collaboration with North Korea.[134] Israel's primary concern appears to be focused on the Shihab-3 ground-to-ground rocket, which has a range of 810 miles, well within the range to strike Israel. Moreover, its relations with India also have an Iranian dimension. On January 21, 2008, India launched an Israeli satellite into orbit from its satellite launch vehicle.[135] The 300-kilogram US$200-million satellite "will dramatically increase Israel's intelligence-gathering capabilities regarding the Islamic Republic's

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[133] BICOM Analysis, "Israel's missile test and Iran's nuclear ambitions", September 11, 2008, http://bicom.org.uk/analysis-article/bicom-analysis-israel-s-missile-test-and-iranian-nuclear-ambitions/, accessed on February 10, 2012

[134] The largest of them Shihab 5 has an estimated range of 3,300 mile but Israel appears to be more concerned with Shihab-3 surface-to-surface missile with an effective range of 810 miles, thereby placing Israel within its range.

[135] P. R. Kumaraswamy, "With Israel, is sky the limit?", *New Indian Express*, (Chennai), January 29, 2008

nuclear programme, since the satellite can transmit images in all weather conditions, a capability that Israel's existing satellites lacked."[136] Israel's newly found proximity and military ties with the Central Asian Muslim Republic of Azerbaijan is also linked to Iran. In February 2012, within days of a suspected Iranian attempt on an Israeli target, both countries signed a military agreement to the tune of US$1.6 billion.[137]

Historically pre-emptive actions have been an integral part of Israeli foreign policy. Since its decision to declare statehood hours before the actual British departure, it has rarely waited for a potential threat to become reality. Any measure it chooses to take against Iran will not be different from this set pattern. Yet, there are a few considerations that Israel and its leaders will not be able to ignore. Some of them are-

1. the effectiveness of the sanctions regime in delaying and perhaps rolling back Iranian nuclear programme;
2. assured degree of success of a military strike against key Iranian installations;
3. its ability to withstand possible Iranian responses;
4. its willingness to endure further isolation and criticism; and
5. repercussions on its relations with other countries, especially in Asia.

Its narrow territorial base does not give Israel sufficient space for a massive retaliatory missile strike against Iran. Even without a barrage of missile attacks by Iranian proxies such as Hamas and Hezbollah, Israel would have a daunting task. Hence, in the end only rational politico-strategic calculations would determine its

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136 Yaakov Katz, "Iran delayed satellite launch" *The Jerusalem Post*, January 23, 2008

137 "Israel signs deal to provide Azerbaijan with $1.6 billion in military equipment", *The Washington Post*, February 26, 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/industries/israel-signs-deal-to-provide-azerbaijan-with-16-billion-in-military-equipment/2012/02/26/gIQAjtmQbR_story.html, accessed on February 29, 2012

decision. While an error of judgment is always a possibility, military option against Iran would not and should not be a trigger-happy decision.

The ongoing tension, rivalry and war of words between Israel and Iran and the possibility of an Israeli military strike against Iranian nuclear programme have naturally affected a number of countries in the Middle East and beyond; and India cannot remain unaffected.

VI. India's Non-parallel Tracks

Since the early 1990s both Israel and Iran have become important for the furtherance of India's political and economic interests. Both countries can be depicted as its strategic partners and their importance transcends formal ties and commercial transactions. If one provides energy security to India, the other significantly contributes to its security and strategic autonomy. However, for India both countries have become relevant from a strategic point of view, only since the end of the Cold War. During the decades of the bi-polar divide, both were firmly entrenched in the American camp and besides their closer ties with Washington both Iran and Israel maintained clandestine but close political and strategic bilateral ties. Their support for, or membership in, various American-led military alliances and agreements ran counter to Indian interests in the Middle East.

That was also the phase when India's foreign policy had adopted a distinctly pro-Soviet flavour. Its profession of non-alignment vis-à-vis the Cold War did not prevent New Delhi from adopting positions that were in harmony with Moscow. This identification with the Soviets became more prominent during the Hungarian and Suez Crises of 1956, June war of 1967, the Czech Crisis of 1968 and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. A broader convergence with the USSR also manifested in India's growing political ties with republican regimes in the Middle East such as Egypt under Gamal Abdul Nasser and Ba'athist Iraq and Syria. While the Cold War was not responsible for India's apathy towards the conservative and pro-western monarchies of the Middle East, the socialist and secular values professed by the republican regimes evoked sympathy among the Indian leadership.

India also had specific issues with Iran as well as Israel. Under the Shah, Iran was politically closer to Pakistan and provided military assistance during the 1965 and 1971 conflicts with India. Though the Iranian logistical support did not alter the course of the Indo-

Pakistani wars, these instances contributed to Indian misgivings on Iran. The Shah's hegemonic ambitions in the early 1970s vis-à-vis the Indian Ocean was another cause for concern. The Islamic Revolution under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini radically transformed Iran and severed the alliance with the US. Marking a foreign policy departure from alliance politics, the Islamic Republic joined the Non-aligned Movement. Under the slogan of "Neither East nor West", Iran was vehemently opposed to the imperialism pursued by the leaders of both the blocks. There was a problem, however. The radical policies of the new regime not only threatened neighbouring Arab countries, but also ran counter to the Indian notion of inclusive secularism. Hence, during the decade following the Islamic revolution, the bilateral relations between India and Iran were 'correct' but not cordial. Cordiality of relations had to wait for the end of the Cold War and the transformation of the global political order. [138]

Likewise, during the Cold War years, Israel posed different sets of problems for India.[139] The roots of the historical baggage of India's Israel policy can be traced to the first quarter of the twentieth century. In the early 1920s, amidst the Khilafat struggle, Indian nationalists began recognising and articulating their position in the political struggle between Arabs and Jews in the then Palestine. Under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, the Indian nationalists found a common cause with the Arabs of Palestine. Driven by strong political rationale, they used moral arguments to express their disapproval of the Jewish aspiration for a national home in Palestine as outlined by the Balfour Declaration of 1917.

As the struggle for freedom intensified, Indian nationalists perceived the Jewish demands in Palestine to be a Siamese twin of Muslim separatism in the sub-continent; the Jewish national home

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[138] The Cold War phase is often ignored in favour of the politically correct and popular slogan of 'civilisational links' with Iran.

[139] For a detailed treatment, see Kumaraswamy, *India's Israel Policy*.

reminded them of a similar demand by the Muslim League, which depicted the Muslims of the sub-continent as a distinct 'nation' because of their religious differences. Thus, as a member of the eleven-member United Nations Special Commission for Palestine (UNSCOP) in 1947 India opposed the idea of partitioning Palestine. Outlining its position just two weeks after the partition of the sub-continent, India advocated federal Palestine as its solution. The Indian plan, however, enjoyed the dubious distinction of being rejected by both Jews and Arabs; the former rejected it because it promised civil and religious rights when they were demanding political rights and sovereignty and the Arabs rejected it because it offered unacceptable concessions to the Jews. Hence, though uncritically venerated within the country, the Federal Plan of India was consigned to the dustbins of history and was never discussed in the UN. However, in line with its traditional position on November 29, 1947, India sided with Arab and Islamic countries to vote against the majority proposal of Palestine's partition.

The establishment of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948 and its recognition by major powers of the world, including the US and the USSR, and its admission into the UN in May 1949 forced India to re-examine its policy. After considerable hesitation and internal deliberations in September 1950, India accorded formal recognition to Israel. Though the official statement did not speak of an immediate establishment of diplomatic relations, there were sufficient indications that normalisation would happen. A pledge to this effect, including the establishment of a resident Indian mission in Israel, was made to Walter Eytan, Director-General in the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs (equivalent of Foreign Secretary in India) by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, in early 1952.

Nehru's promise of normalisation took four decades to materialise. The initial constraints of budget and lack of personnel were compounded by a number of political problems. Education Minister Abul Kalam Azad is often held responsible for prevailing over Nehru to defer normalisation because of fears over sentiments of domestic Muslim population and Pakistan's diplomatic

manoeuvres in the Arab world.[140] Shortly after the Israel-led tripartite aggression against Egypt in 1956, Prime Minister Nehru told the parliament that it was not an appropriate time to establish relations with Israel. Since then, the absence of opportune moment became the standard Indian position vis-à-vis normalisation with Israel.

It was the end of the Cold War and structural changes in the international political order that enabled India to revisit the issue and move towards normalisation.[141] By then the Arab countries had moved towards a negotiated political settlement with Israel within the frame of the Madrid Middle East peace conference that began on October 30, 1991. The willingness of the Palestinians to abandon armed struggle and seek co-existence with the Jewish State meant that there was no need for India to be more Palestinian than Yasser Arafat. On January 29, 1992, India normalised relations with the Jewish State. Since then the bilateral relations have flourished considerably and expanded into political, economic, cultural, educational and military spheres.

Thus, despite India's civilisational links with the Jews and Persians, meaningful political relations with Israel and Iran are a post-Cold War phenomenon. India signalled its readiness to embrace the new challenges by bringing about fundamental changes in its policy. At the political level, it marked its departure from the Cold War policies by establishing diplomatic relations with Israel while integration with the processes of globalisation through reforms characterised changes in the economic arena. In their own ways, both Israel and Iran contributed to India's new political aspirations and economic needs. Israel soon emerged as a major supplier of arms to India and Iran became a principal supplier of India's rising energy demands. By meeting critical needs in the military and energy sectors, both Israel and Iran have emerged as India's strategic partners.

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[140] Michael Brecher, *The New States of Asia: A Political Analysis* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p.130; and S Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979ff), Vol. 2, p.170

[141] P. R. Kumaraswamy, "India and Israel: Prelude to normalisation", *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 19, No. 2, winter 1995, pp.53-73

It is possible to argue that the pace of the Indo-Israeli relations is driven by the extent of military-security cooperation between the two countries.[142] This is not confined to arms imports from Israel but also encompasses closer cooperation in intelligence sharing, counter-terrorism, collaboration in missile defence and border management. There are regular and structural interactions between the two security establishments. Through joint research both countries are also working towards gaining qualitative edge over their adversaries and are striving for technological autonomy. A number of their ongoing defence research programmes are similar or complementary. Despite the predominance of the military-security dimension, other areas too have seen progress in bilateral relations since 1992. There has been significant growth in economic relations, investments and interactions in the fields of agriculture, irrigation, horticulture, water management and infrastructure.

More substantial political benefits of Indo-Israeli relations have to be measured through the growing interaction between India and the wider Middle East. Before 1992, India's political closeness with the Arab world was accompanied by its meagre economic interaction and influence. Economic liberalisation and consistent growth since the mid-1990s has transformed India into a reliable hub of economic opportunities for the Arab and Islamic countries of the Middle East. Hence, despite the growing Indo-Israeli relations, the countries of the region, including those publicly hostile towards the Jewish State, have increased their political and economic interactions with India. None of the countries, despite occasional disapprovals from Egypt under Hosni Mubarak, has made Israel an issue while pursuing closer ties with India. This has also been true for Iran; except for its initial disapproval of the normalisation of relations, the Islamic Republic did not make Israel a factor in pursuing political and economic relations with New

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[142] For a recent discussion, see Efraim Inbar and Alvite Singh Ningthoujam, "Indo-Israeli defence cooperation in the twenty-first century", *MERIA Journal*, (Herzliya, Israel), vol. 15, no.4, December 2011, http://www.gloria-center.org/2011/12/indo-israeli-defense-cooperation-in-the-twenty-first-century/, (accessed April 1, 2012).

Delhi.[143] Indeed, the tension in recent years between Tehran and New Delhi has more to do with the US than Israel. Thus, India's relations with the Middle East became robust after and not before normalisation with Israel. It is possible to argue that the growing Indo-Israeli relations compelled other Middle Eastern countries to reach out to India and seek its support on a reciprocal basis. It was not due to Israel but because of India's emergence as an economic power; yet, contrary to some perceptions India's political fortunes in the region increased only after 1992.

Similarly, Iran has also contributed to India's growth and search for influence.[144] The emergence of Iran as a major supplier of crude oil coincided with India's difficulties with its traditional friend, Iraq. Two costly wars and economic sanctions following the Kuwait crisis put severe stress on the bilateral relations with a politically weak and economically ruined Ba'athist Iraq. Besides finding alternate sources, India also needed additional energy supplies to meet its reform-driven energy appetite. With its huge oil and gas reserves, Iran emerged as a potential partner for India's energy security needs. Energy cooperation became a principal plank of furthering their bilateral relations and both sought cooperation through LNG deal, gas pipeline and oil exploration. Though most of these agreements faced political controversies and technological difficulties, the intent of cooperation has been very palpable.

Growing Indo-Iranian ties were also marked by greater political exchanges between the two countries. While in office, both the Congress Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) hosted and visited Iranian leaders. Since the early 1990s, all the three Iranian presidents, namely, Hashemi Rafsanjani (April 1995), Mohammed Khatami (January 2003) and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (April 2008) have visited India while Prime Ministers Narasimha Rao (September 1993), Atal Behari Vajpayee (April 2001) and Manmohan Singh (August 2012)

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[143] P. R. Kumaraswamy, "Indo-Iranian Ties: The Israeli Dimension" in Robert M Hathaway et al (ed.) *The "Strategic partnership" between India and Iran*, *Special Report 120, Asia Program, Woodrow Wilson Center*, (Washington, April 2004), pp.27-31

[144] On the bilateral relations, see C. Christine Fair, "India and Iran: New Delhi's Balancing Act," *The Washington Quarterly*, vol.30, no.3, Summer 2007, pp. 145-59.

visited Tehran. This was a reflection of the emerging national consensus vis-à-vis Iran; diverse political forces within India- the Congress, the BJP, the Communist parties as well as regional parties, committed themselves to forging closer ties with Iran. One could notice similar national consensus vis-à-vis Israel in the 1990s when even the Communist parties came around to recognising the political value of normalisation of relations with Israel and sought greater economic cooperation between the Communist ruled state of West Bengal and the Jewish State.[145]

In pursuing closer ties with both these countries, India has had to take into account a third factor in the Middle East- the Arab world.[146] Fears over Arab concerns and opposition were more visible in the case of Israel and hence were managed better. India allayed Arab fears by signalling that it had not abandoned its traditional support for the Palestinians. More than two decades after Indo-Israeli normalisation, its position on major issues concerning the Middle East peace process has not changed. New Delhi continues to support the political rights of the Palestinians, including their right to self-determination and statehood. The two-state solution continues to be its preference to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict and for regional peace and stability. Considerable progress in its bilateral relations with Israel has been accompanied by its refusal to dilute its position on core issues between Israel and the Palestinians. By delinking its disagreements with Israel over the peace process, not only has India furthered bilateral relations, but has also addressed Arab misgivings and suspicions.

Similar sophistication and finesse, however, is lacking in its management of Arab concerns vis-à-vis Iran. This is partly because these concerns are of recent provenance and there is yet no unanimity in the Arab world regarding the threats posed by Tehran. Even while pursuing relations with Iran, India sought to

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[145] This phase, however, ended following the outbreak of the al-Aqsa intifada.

[146] P. R. Kumaraswamy, *Indo-Iranian Relations and the Arab Prism*, (The Emirates Occasional Paper No. 64 (Abu Dhabi: Emirates Centre for Strategic Studies Research, 2008)

remain relatively indifferent towards Iran's Middle Eastern aspirations. Iran's growing military capabilities and apparent advances in the non-conventional arsenal over the past two decades have not evoked considerable attention in New Delhi. This indifference is reflected in the annual survey of the Ministry of Defence. Going by its description of the "Security Environment" of the neighbourhood, one might wonder if India is located in the Swiss Alps rather than in the troubled neighbourhood of southern Asia. It does not refer to, let alone ponder the implications of the military capabilities of Iran and the possible threats they pose to its Arab neighbours as well as to India. Its principal concern remains the intentions of Iran and not its capabilities.[147] Given this mindset, it would not be logical to expect the Indian security establishment to recognise and respond to Arab concerns vis-à-vis the Iran. This was highlighted by the controversy surrounding the reported assassination attempt against the Saudi ambassador to the US Adel al-Jubeir late last year. When the issue was eventually brought before the UN on November 18, 2011, India chose to abstain during the vote. As tension in the Persian Gulf grows, especially over Iran's purported nuclear weapons development, India would not be able to ignore the Arab fears over an Iranian hegemony and domination. Its ability to pursue more profitable relations with the Arab countries heavily depends upon a modus vivendi that New Delhi must evolve with the Arab countries over Iran.

Above all, India's bilateral relations with Israel and Iran are heavily influenced by the US factor. At one level, the latter has played a positive and constructive role in Indo-Israeli relations. The growth in India's political and strategic ties with Israel are largely facilitated by the American support and understanding. Without the American backing, for example, Israel could not have sold the Phalcon AWACS to India.[148] At the same time, the US has played a negative role in India's relations with Iran. Since the early 2000s,

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147 This logic is equally valid for India's relations with the US and Russia.

148 Vehement American opposition, for example, resulted in Israel cancelling a similar AWACS deal with China.

it had sought to curb India's political as well as energy relations with the Iran. The American influence and pressures were most visibly manifested in September 2005 when India voted with the US in the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) over the Iranian nuclear programme.[149] Since then it is possible to notice an imprint of American influence in the Indian abandonment of crucial energy-related deals with Iran. The deep-freezing of the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline, non-realisation of the LNG deal, substantial reduction in India's export of petroleum products to Iran and difficulties in oil-payments to Iran are largely, if not exclusively, due to American pressures. In short, while it facilitates closer ties with Israel, Washington prevents even normal commercial transactions with Iran because of the nuclear controversy.

The controversy over Iran's nuclear ambition has derailed the delicate Indian balance vis-à-vis Iran and Israel. During the 1990s and early 2000s, India had managed to pursue close and productive relations with both these countries by denying veto power to either of them in its dealings with the other. This was the case even when the policies of the Islamic Republic ran counter to Indian positions and interests vis-à-vis the Middle East peace process. The Iranian opposition to a negotiated settlement for the Arab-Israeli conflict has been accompanied by its political as well as military support to groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah, which as we discussed earlier, undermined Israeli security. Much to Israeli displeasure and consternation, India refused to object to various anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish rhetoric by Iranian leaders and officials. Taking refuge under its recognition and normalisation, India never responded to various Holocaust denial statements by President Ahmadinejad and other public figures in Iran.[150] At the same time, disagreements with Israel over the peace process did not inhibit India from pursuing closer bilateral ties with the Jewish State; the launching of the spy satellite in January 2008, is an illustration of this bonhomie. In short, for long India kept its relations with Israel and

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[149] P. R. Kumaraswamy, India's nuke dance over Iran", *Strategic Insights*, vol.6, no.5, August 2007, http://www.nps.edu/Academics/centers/ccc/publications/OnlineJournal/2007/Aug/kumaraswamyAug07.html (accessed August 6, 2012),

[150] For example, "India recognized Israel decades ago", *The Hindu*, October 28, 2005

Iran along non-parallel tracks; one being independent of the other. The nuclear controversy and increasing concerns over an Israeli military option against the Iranian nuclear programme have ruptured this Indian non-parallelism.

The tension between Israel and Iran reached the Indian shores on February 13, 2012 when a terror attack struck an Israeli embassy vehicle in New Delhi.[151] Following investigations, on March 17, four Iranian citizens were charged in a Delhi court for their suspected involvement; this includes Masoud Sedaghatzadeh who was arrested by the Malaysian police a few days earlier for another terror-related offence. Interpol arrest notices have been issued against the three Iranian citizens and efforts are under way to secure the extradition of the fourth suspect from Malaysia. These developments were in accord with the initial Israeli suspicion of an Iranian involvement in the New Delhi attack as well as in similar attempts on Israeli targets in Tbilisi and Bangkok around the same time. It would be too early to draw hasty conclusions and finger pointing without evidence is like fishing in a frozen lake, a hobby for the frivolous. While the four suspects are identified as Iranian nationals, the involvement of the state or its agencies will not be easy to establish. Perhaps rogue elements within or outside the system could be involved in the terror attack.

What is clear, however, is that India is no longer immune to the escalating tensions between Israel and Iran. While it seeks closer and mutually beneficial ties with both these countries, their bilateral tensions will affect India's ability and options. It can no longer quarantine one bilateral track from the other. As the prospects of a military confrontation over suspected nuclear ambitions of Iran escalate, what are India's options?

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[151] S. Samuel C. Rajiv, "India and West Asian Political Tensions", *IDSA Commentary*, February 16, 2012, http://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/IndiaandWest AsianPolitical Tensions_sscrajiv_160212, (accessed August 6, 2012)

VII. Policy Options for India

Since the end of the Cold War, India's relations with Israel and Iran have improved considerably. The normalisation of relations with Israel in January 1992 was followed by robust political, economic and military security relations between India and Israel. Similarly, the political pragmatism exhibited by the Iranian leadership enabled India to expand its relationship with Iran, with energy security playing a key role. Both these countries are vital for India's economic growth and security and hence, India would have to learn to manage its relations with Israel as well Iran. What are the options for India?

- ***No need to take sides***: Both Israel and Iran are important countries in the Middle East and both are vital for India; one is important for its energy security and other plays a crucial role in its military security calculus. India should not feel the need to choose between the two, especially in the wake of the February 2012 terror attack on the Israeli vehicle in New Delhi.

- ***Managing differing pressures***: Both Iran and Israel approach their bilateral issues with India rather differently. Iran has been extremely friendly and accommodative of India's bilateral ties with Israel. Except for opposition in the period soon after Indo-Israeli normalisation, Tehran has not flagged Israel in its relations with New Delhi. This however is not true for Israel, which has often flagged Iran in its bilateral ties with New Delhi. India needs to manage these different attitudes of both countries towards its bilateral relations with the other.

- ***Failure to define non-parallel interests***: The maturity shown by New Delhi on the Indo-Israeli track has been absent in the Indo-Iranian track. India has managed to handle its relations with Israel better than its relations with Iran. It has carefully delineated its differences with Israel over the peace process and in the process managed to quarantine the bilateral relations

with Israel from it. Thus, despite the differences, both have worked towards the evolution of a matured bilateral cooperation that has become the envy of many countries in the Middle East and beyond. India has failed to evolve a similar model in its relations with Iran. Its energy interests in Iran (despite the technical and price issues) are different from the nuclear controversy and its differences with Tehran over the nuclear question are both strategic as well as political. However, New Delhi has failed to articulate and communicate these differences to Tehran because it has not differentiated the two, something it did with Israel between the bilateral ties and the peace process. As a result, India's differences over the nuclear issue has spilled over and undermined its bilateral ties with Iran. Its failure to recognise the non-parallel nature of the relationship with Iran has clouded and even poisoned its ties with Tehran.

- ***Differing attitude of the US*:** The attitude of the US towards both the bilateral relations has also been different. While the India-Israel-US alliance is an inaccurate and misleading description, the US role has been critical in the rapid growth of security-related cooperation between India and Israel. Without the support of the US, for example, Israel could not have sold Phalcon AWACS to India when a similar sale to China was vetoed by Washington. At the same time, the US has been exerting considerable pressures on India to reduce its political, economic and energy ties with Iran.

- ***Mishandling the US factor*:** India's handling of the US factor in both the cases has been different with differing outcomes. Washington continues to have differences with New Delhi over its stand on the Middle East peace process and has been pressing the latter to be more supportive of Israel, especially in international fora such as the UN General Assembly. It sought, for example, India's support for the Goldstone Report that was extremely critical of Israel's Gaza War of 2008-09. Still India differed with the US, conveyed its disagreement and joined others in voting against the US-Israeli position. This was possible because India had defined, articulated and

conveyed its disagreements with Israel over the peace process. Similar nuances were lacking in its handling of the US pressures on Iran. Since the September 2005 vote in the IAEA, a number of Indian actions and statements have been directly or indirectly linked to the American pressure. Its dithering on the Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline issue, suspension of the payment arrangement for its oil imports from Iran and the termination of export of petroleum products to Iran amply testify that India has not followed a well-thought-out policy when it comes to American pressures on Iran.

- ***Lack of Strategic Clarity*:** India's mishandling of the US factor vis-à-vis Iran is the result of the lack of strategic clarity. New Delhi needs to recognise, define and communicate to the outside world (not necessarily through public discourses) of its agreements and disagreements with Iran. A clear articulation of its disagreements over the nuclear issue would have considerably minimised the negative fallouts. The problem is not about nuclear double standards (nuclear India wanting a non-nuclear Iran), rather it is about India fighting shy of saying the obvious: a nuclear Iran is a threat to the Persian Gulf and the wider Middle East.

- ***Factoring the Arab concerns*:** Over the years, India's relations with Israel ceased to be a controversy in the Middle East. With occasional exceptions (especially Egypt under President Mubarak) most have come to terms with the Indo-Israel ties, which are no longer an agenda in their dealings with New Delhi. This however, is not true of the Indo-Iranian track. Even if one were to leave Israel aside, there are other countries in the region who are equally worried over Iran and hence its perceived proximity with India. Fears over India's growing ties with Tehran are not confined to the US and the West but also to the Arab neighbours of Iran. Lack of public articulation of this concern by the Arab countries should not be seen as their acceptance of the growing Indo-Iranian ties; their concerns vis-à-vis the US highlighted by the WikiLeaks cables are equally valid for India. Hence, New Delhi cannot afford to pursue an Iran policy disregarding the Arab concerns and fears but it

will have to accommodate them. This is especially so since its political, economic, energy and expatriate interests lie not in Iran but in the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf.

- ***Fight Terrorism Irrespective of Energy Security*:** The February 2012 attack on the Israeli diplomatic vehicle has brought the Israel-Iran tension on to the Indian soil. After considerable hesitation, a Delhi court issued warrants against Iranian nationals for their suspected involvement in the blast. A few days later, the Interpol issued a worldwide red alert for their arrest. This has put India in a tight corner. During the initial phase of the probe, it was reluctant to join the chorus that suspected Iranian involvement in the attack. Its support for the UNSC statement against terrorist attacks on Israeli diplomats was conditioned upon Iran or any other country not being named. Protecting foreign diplomats and their institutions are the responsibility of the government and India would have to rise to that challenge. However, once evidence linking the terror attacks and Iranian nationals became available, it had no option but to act. The involvement of the Iranian state or its agencies is still in the realm of speculations but India would not be able to remain silent. The Delhi attack was not a 26/11 Mumbai terror act and Iran is not Pakistan where political consideration played a heavy role in curtailing Indian responses. Political correctness towards the Delhi blast would have disastrous consequences for India's diplomacy and foreign policy. Professed friendship with India apparently did not prevent some citizens of Iran from violating its sovereign territory for a terrorist attack. There is no reason for India to consider Iran's strategic importance while pursuing the Delhi blast. Its fight against terrorism should not be subjected to energy security or other concerns.

- ***Israel is just part of the larger Iranian problem with the US*:** The mounting tensions between the Islamic Republic and Israel are a part of Iran's larger problem with the US. Both countries have a large baggage that dates back to the early days of the Islamic revolution. Many Iranians have not forgotten the role played by the CIA in the overthrow of the popular

government of Muhammad Mossadegh in 1953 and thereby undermining democracy in Iran. So long as the differences are not resolved to the mutual satisfaction of Tehran and Washington and a modicum of normalcy does not return, India will not be able to delink the US from its relations with Iran. Hence, it will have to be watchful of every step, big or small, it takes towards Tehran.

- ***Cannot ignore security issues over Iran*:** The defence establishment in India will have to move away from its diplomatic blinkers and start looking at Iran through the security prism. Since the end of the long war with Iraq, Tehran has rebuilt its military capabilities and has made strident progress, especially in the missile delivery systems. Through indigenous efforts or with external assistance, it has developed an array of medium and long-range missiles. They are partly developed with Israel in mind but there are no reasons why Iran would not deploy them against others in the Gulf and beyond. American weapons were supplied to Pakistan to fight the Soviet Union but were used against India. The world is yet to witness a technology that is country-specific. The Iranian missiles can carry conventional as well as non-conventional warheads and a vast number of India's strategic assets on the western coast are within the striking range of these Iranian missiles. Hence, the strategic survey published by the Ministry of Defence in its annual report will have to reflect Iranian military capabilities and not its political intentions. Let the generals focus only on hardcore security issues and leave the intricacies of diplomacy and niceties to the Ministry of External Affairs.

This study examines Israel's changing perception of Iran and the underlying reasons for the current Israeli tension, anxiety, verbal acrimony and fears. In deconstructing Israel's fears vis-à-vis Iran, the study looks at Israel's failures to revisit its erstwhile peripheral diplomacy and to make adequate changes. Israel was unable to overcome the nostalgia of the past bonhomie and evolve a cohesive policy on Iran. Moreover, it was afraid of the cost of such a radical shift in its fundamental plank vis-à-vis Iran: the peripheral diplomacy. With the result, Iran soon became a nightmare for Israeli foreign policy and the security establishment. The nuclear controversy is just a recent addition. Given the growing importance of Israel and Iran to India, what are New Delhi's options vis-à-vis the Israel-Iran tensions?

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