

Israel's World of War and Power

Every day you get a new deck of cards

by [Mordechai Nisan](#) (June 2026)



Israeli soldiers in the Gaza Strip (Spiegel archive 1967)

Surprise, Surprise. *Russia fell victim to the Nazi Barbarossa Operation when Germany initiated a surprise attack on June 22, 1941, to eradicate communism and occupy the western part of the country. The Soviet Union recovered and defeated Nazi Germany.*

America, surprised by an impending attack by Japan on its

Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor, lost 2403 personnel on December 7, 1941. The United States recovered and defeated Imperial Japan.

Israel, caught unaware by a joint Egyptian–Syrian assault on October 6, 1973, lost 2656 soldiers in the course of the Yom Kippur War. Israel recovered and captured Arab territory.

Israel on October 7, 2023 was unprepared for an imminent attack by Hamas from the Gaza Strip, which resulted in over 1200 dead Israelis. Israel recovered and, as the scope of the war expanded, seized half of Gaza, parts of southern Lebanon and territory east of the Golan Heights in Syria – and executed devastating aerial attacks on Iran’s military installations and key regime personnel.

Surprise in war provides a great advantage to the attacker as part of a strategy for which a “stratagem implies a concealed intention,” wrote Clausewitz in *On War*. Victory is still not assured and depends on an array of factors, including leadership and resources—and good fortune.

A New Deck Every Day

Circumstances constantly change and an alert government must respond appropriately. Each day you hold a new deck, even then you may be holding the wrong deck.

President Reagan, in negotiating with Russia, coined the phrase “Trust but Verify” to acknowledge his suspicion of signing a nuclear agreement with America’s superpower rival. Henry Kissinger, Secretary of State for President Nixon, was explicit in his book *Years of Renewal*: “What penalty has there ever been for revoking a peace agreement or for disregarding a proclamation of non-belligerency?” International politics function in a world of chaos, no supra-government and no one to enforce law.

In an earlier period of history, British and French politicians believed that in absorbing Sudetenland Hitler would be satiated, and then leave the rest of Czechoslovakia alone. Churchill understood better, remarking in November 1938, “appeasement stimulates a more ferocious appetite.” Throwing a small state to the wolves is a callous capitulation that can end in war and dishonor.

Borders and War

Israel has not known one day of real peace and security, threatened from near and far, from Arabs, Iranians, and Turks, often abandoned by ostensible friends. Porous borders, vulnerable borders, indefensible borders, throw in relief a topographical handicap—especially before 1967—and geographic deficiency. Israel needs a strong national will, effective arms, and constant alertness—appallingly absent in October 1973 and October 2023—to compensate for the multiple disadvantages and challenges facing the Jewish state.

Israel found itself in a geo-political situation that was far from being ambivalent. Its initial territorial width of a mere 16 kilometers (9 miles) until 1967, and 70 kilometers (43 miles) width thereafter, was a strategic nightmare of unique dimensions. Admittedly, Israel’s victory in the Six-Day War provided territorial gains—the Golan Heights, Judea and Samaria, and the Sinai desert—that strengthened its military posture on all fronts. Yet its tiny size could never match the magnitude of the alarming peril all around and from within.

Axioms of War

Three Israeli military axioms justified the doctrine of the legitimate war:

1. ***Fighting on enemy territory.*** This was the case in the

1956 Sinai Campaign, the June War of 1967, the Yom Kippur 1973 war, the 1982 War in Lebanon, and the Swords of Iron War in Gaza in 2023, with its spillover into Lebanon, Syria, and Iran. Were war not carried into enemy territory, beyond Israel's infinitesimal land base, mass death and massive destruction would strike the home front with horrific devastation.

2. ***Initiating wars.*** Israel did successfully initiate war in 1956, 1967, and 1982. So too the IDF carried out a major strike against Iran in June 2025, as both punishment for years of Iran financing and arming its axis proxies to attack Israel, and incessantly threatening Israel with nuclear annihilation. A preemptive offensive disabling enemy forces and denying them an effective second-strike capacity can be necessary to save the country from extinction.

3. ***Prosecuting short wars.*** Because the IDF is a small standing army, it relies on mobilizing reserve soldiers drawn from the civilian population especially in times of war. Israel's wars should optimally be limited in time so that the country return to its full economic functioning. The short Six-Day War of 1967, like the Sinai Campaign in 1956, illustrated this principle. Appropriately, Israel battling the Egyptian army in the Sinai in 1973 lasted only 17 days.

The war that opened in the western Negev and Gaza on October 7, 2023, expanding to other military theatres and extending to more than two and a half years, imposed a weighty responsibility on the reserve army many of whose soldiers served for hundreds of days. Ehud Barak, former Prime Minister and Defense Minister, misconstrued the needs of Israel, having earlier advocated for a small army while ruminating about peace. It would seem elemental that a small war-prone country like Israel

requires a large army.

The Implications of Failed Deterrence

Two concepts drawn from the Cold War era, despite their dubious relevance for Israel, will help clarify its geopolitical and military environment. America adopted the *containment* strategy toward the Soviet Union to block further territorial advancement or military aggression into the heart of Europe. America's atomic bomb, conventional forces stationed in Europe, and the NATO alliance, were the combined tools to prevent Communist expansionism. Israel, however, lacks the size, resources, and the geo-political weight to engage in a policy of containment: a dwarf cannot contain a giant of vast territorial scope.

Israel nonetheless believed it has the military means and battle experience to exercise a policy of *deterrence* toward states that bear her ill. This became the strategic hallmark of Israel's military posture over the years. However, the record of history was clear and cruel: the Arab enemy was determined to pursue the path of war regardless of Israel's formidable military might. Israel failed to deter Egypt from launching the War of Attrition soon after the June 1967 war, and then again to deter Egypt from taking the lead in an offensive assault in October 1973. Sadat's search for honor and his sophisticated use of military machinations duped the Israelis.

Arafat fooled Yitzhak Rabin in 1993 to think Israel would successfully deter future Palestinian warfare; as Nasrallah fooled Ehud Barak to think withdrawing from south Lebanon in 2000 would deter future Hezbollah warfare. The October 7 Hamas murderous invasion was painful proof that Israel's vaunted policy of deterrence – to intimidate Hamas with money and jobs – proved vacuous.

The Islamic adage— “Muslims love to die and the Jews love to live” —captures the anomaly that Muslims are prepared to fight *even* when their cause is lost. This paradox negates the efficacy of deterrence as a reliable and robust deterrence posture over time.

War and Power

Let us recall wars different in scope but similar in spirit to Israel’s wars—like the United States in Vietnam and the Soviet Union in Afghanistan—where stronger powers succumbed to peoples weaker technologically but armed ideologically with an unbreakable iron will. Insurgency warriors suffered enormous losses, but capitulation was not in their lexicon. So too in Gaza and Lebanon, also in Judea and Samaria, where Israel faced seemingly indomitable enemies, and the war continued.

Israel possesses impressive elements of national power that enable it to prosecute war effectively over time, as since October 2023. These include sophisticated scientific and technological capabilities and assets, advanced military industries and an efficient military establishment. Israel’s air force demonstrated exceptional skills in the war against Iran beginning in June 2025. Gas fields in the sea are an essential component of national power for domestic use and exports, assuring the electricity power grid in all situations.

Perhaps the most significant qualitative element in Israel’s national arsenal is high morale, a patriotic spirit, a readiness to don military gear, and defend the country fearlessly. After 2,000 years of statelessness, the Jews understand that between existence and the abyss stands the Israeli army alone.

The Power Pariah

Israel, a small power, rose to middle power recognition, regarded now as a regional power in the Middle East. Israel's extensive military campaign following the shock of October 7 caused devastation to Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon, battering Iran and hitting Yemen, enabled by its state of the art intelligence capabilities and operational military professionalism of special, if not incomparable, dimensions. The decapitation of the most senior Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iranian leaders was a stunning achievement.

Indices rank Israel as a first-world country: with an average annual income above France and the United Kingdom, first-class medical services with high life expectancy placing her fourth in the world, and an economy growing at a faster rate, with extraordinary foreign investments, than almost all other countries. Israel emerged as top tier global AI hub, a leading start-up nation, and a foremost innovator and supplier of military products. Growing tomatoes in the desert, developing desalination technology, and building anti-missile defense systems, were indicative of Israel's unique creativity—in the earth, on the water, and in the air. Israel proved impervious to any limitations and outclassed most advanced countries. Of special mention was Israel's exceptional role in sending medical and humanitarian missions to assist countries hit by earthquakes—Haiti in 2010, Japan in 2011, Nepal in 2015, and Turkiye in 2023.

Although castigated as a political pariah, and the butt of political bullies in the United Nations and the International Criminal Court, Israel yet succeeded to ascend a trajectory to upgrade its place in the world.

Israel and the World

The Jewish people's ancient historic identity rooted in

nationality, religion, and language, was set on the Asian continent. This cultural milieu corresponds with Israel's close ties with India, in the area of space, water, and weaponry, and epitomized by the friendship between Prime Minister Netanyahu and Prime Minister Modi. Although political fluidity is constant in the political and diplomatic arenas, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and the Philippines, have looked upon the Jewish state with favor.

Central Asia and westward to the Caucasus provide a field for positive Israeli ties with Muslim countries. Israel purchases oil from Kazakhstan and assists in farming; Azerbaijan provides gas and oil, buys weaponry, acquires cybersecurity technology, and engages in intelligence cooperation monitoring the Iranian border. Considering Eastern Europe, positive political ties, trade and tourism, bind Israel with, among others, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Bulgaria. Germany in Central Europe offers a relationship with satisfactory sides that include Israel selling the Arrow defense system for the astounding sum of \$6.7 billion in 2025.

Serbia in the Balkans is a staunch friend of Israel, with co-production of drones a recent addition to their ties.

Albania, a Muslim country, conducts ties with Israel and offers political support. Greece has strengthened military relations with Israel to the level of a strategic partnership, including air force and naval exercises, and the purchase of defense systems. Cooperation in the energy field includes the participation of Cyprus.

The broad vision of the proposed International Middle East Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC) in 2003 conceived of trans-continental trade designed to connect Asia with Europe. From India to Saudi Arabia, with locations in Israel and Greece, shipping, rail, and road networks will challenge China's Belt and Road Initiative. For Israel, it is successfully upgrading the range of her ties and enhancing her role in international affairs.

We complete our *tour d'horizon* with Africa and Latin America. Israel's assistance to Black Africa covers agriculture and health services, extending to security and weaponry, while conducting relations with some 40 sub-Saharan countries. In South America, Israel has strengthened ties with Argentina under President Javier Milei, also with Paraguay, and with Bolivia and Chile renewing active diplomatic relations with Israel. Just as a European world order has long passed, a European-focused Israeli foreign policy as a corollary is now in abeyance, but not nullified.

Thus, Israel's international reach has extended its scope to the Far East, the Indian sub-continent, Central Asia and the Caucasus, the Mediterranean basin, to Africa and South America. The Abraham Accords, under the aegis of the United States, provided a diplomatic breakthrough for Israel to establish relations with four Muslim countries—Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates in the Persian Gulf, with Sudan and Morocco in Africa. It has been able to exploit shared interests with a number of countries: India against Pakistan, Japan against China, and Greece against Turkiye. A recent addition to Israel's strategic map is Somaliland on the Horn of Africa, located across the Red Sea waterway from Yemen, where Houti proxies fired missiles northward to the Israeli port of Eilat in 2023. Yemen renewed its launches toward Israel in March 2026.

Israel's "minorities' strategy," another element in a creative policy, included ties or understandings, public and less public, with a number of peoples: Kurds in Iraq, Druze in Syria, Kabyles in Algeria, and Maronites in Lebanon. Israel is far from being isolated across the region, and beyond.

Israel and the Search for Balance

A political equilibrium or "balance of power" is a rational

mechanism to achieve stability in a regional or international system. No single power should be able to threaten or overwhelm the rest of the political actors in a geographically defined space. Political coalitions form to offset a hegemonic menace from one power or alliance of powers. The balance will guarantee stability, with avoiding conflict and war being the sole imperative.

The great equalizer for Israel in the Arab–Israeli theatre of conflict has been the United States. Here is the *deus ex machina* balancer from afar. Washington has provided military weaponry, technological cooperation, economic assistance, and diplomatic support, over time. The United States served as a balancer augmenting Israel's power facing Arab countries. Were America to stop supporting Israel, or adopt a hostile policy, the balance of power equation would unravel and the likelihood of war would increase. America the balancer is a force for stability in the Middle East.

Notwithstanding the Peace Treaty of 1979, a Cold War defines Israel's political relations with Egypt, which never abandoned a war option and whose massive arms procurements and military drills in Sinai were blatantly provocative. Of all Arab countries, Egypt is the primary–or sole–strategic threat to Israel, and this is reason enough for the Jewish state to bolster the balance by collaborating with regional partners. One such candidate is the United Arab Emirates, considering that Israel provided Abu Dhabi with its Iron Dome shield to intercept incoming Iranian missile attacks. The wheel of change was turning as Israelis assisted Sunni Arabs against Shiite Iranians, as evidence that in the Middle East you should never be surprised at anything.

Ineluctably the Arab–Israeli conflict and the malignant Palestinian Question persist. Time and circumstances have rendered complete and true reconciliation beyond the ken of reality. October 7 exploded the myth and paradigm of a two-state solution. Palestinians of all political and ideological

stripes, and their Jew-hating fans across the world, remain committed to a one-state solution: *Palestine, without Israel*.

On the Israeli side, Prime Ministers Rabin, Barak, and Sharon, presided over territorial withdrawals as self-styled visionary peacemakers. Just as you do not win a war by withdrawing, you also do not generally achieve peace by withdrawing. America learned this from a distance in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Has Israel learned this lesson in Judea and Samaria, Lebanon, and Gaza? Withdrawal carries the ignominy of retreat and the shame of capitulation. No one should gamble with the future of the state of Israel, or take steps that render the quest for a balance of power futile and counter-productive.

For the most part, peace is a human invention while war is the commanding reality. As Barbara Tuchman showed in her magisterial volume, *The March of Folly* (1984): robbed of reason, men create their own doom.

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