

Chaos and 2nd Cold War, Part II: Israel's Nuclear Strategy

How will Russia respond to any ramped up American uses of force in the Middle East, and, more plausibly, vice-versa?

One must assume that Jerusalem is already asking these key questions, and even wondering whether, in part, greater mutualities of interest could sometime exist with Moscow than with Washington.

To wit, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with Russia's President Vladimir Putin in September 2015. Among other things, the Israeli leader must be calculating: 1) Will the Obama Administration's incoherent retreat from most of the Middle East point toward a more permanent United States detachment from the region; and 2) If it does, what other major powers are apt to fill the resultant vacuum? Just as importantly, and as an obvious corollary to (2), above, the prime minister should be inquiring: "How will the still-emerging Cold War II axis of conflict impact America's pertinent foreign policy decisions?"

There are some additional ironies yet to be noted. Almost certainly, ISIS, unless it is first crushed by U.S. and/or Russian-assisted counter-measures, will plan to march westward across Jordan, ultimately winding up at the borders of West Bank (Judea/Samaria). There, ISIS Jihadists could likely make fast work of any still-posted Hamas and Fatah forces, in effect, taking over what might once have become "Palestine." In this now fully imaginable scenario, the most serious impediment to Palestinian statehood is not Israel, but rather a murderous band of Sunni Arab terrorists. [\[16\]](#)

What about the larger picture of "Cold War II?" Israeli defense planners will need to factor into their suitably nuanced calculations the dramatically changing relationship

between Washington and Moscow. During "Cold War I," much of America's support for the Jewish State had its most fundamental origins in a perceived need to compete successfully in the Middle East with the then Soviet Union. In the progressive development of "Cold War II," Jerusalem will need to carefully re-calculate whether a similar "bipolar" dynamic is once again underway, and whether the Russian Federation might, this time around, identify certain strategic benefits to favoring Israel in regional geo-politics.

In all such strategic matters, once Israel had systematically sorted through the probable impact of emerging "superpower" involvements in the Middle East, Jerusalem would need to reassess its historic "bomb in the basement." Conventional wisdom, of course, has routinely pointed in a fundamentally different policy direction. Still, this "wisdom" assumes that credible nuclear deterrence is simply an automatic result of physically *holding* nuclear weapons. By the logic of this too-simplistic argument, removing Israel's nuclear bomb from the "basement" would only elicit new waves of global condemnation, and would likely do so without returning any commensurate security benefits to Jerusalem.

Scholars know, for good reason, that the conventional wisdom is often unwise. Looking ahead, the strategic issues facing Israel are not at all uncomplicated or straightforward.

Moreover, in the immutably arcane world of Israeli nuclear deterrence, it can never really be adequate that enemy states merely acknowledge the Jewish State's nuclear status. Rather, it is also important that these states should be able to believe that Israel holds *usable* nuclear weapons, and that Jerusalem/Tel-Aviv would be *willing* to employ these usable weapons in certain clear, and situationally recognizable, circumstances.

Current instabilities in the Middle East will underscore several good reasons to doubt that Israel could ever benefit from any stubborn continuance of deliberate nuclear ambiguity.

It would seem, too, from certain apparent developments already taking place within Mr. Netanyahu's "inner cabinet," that portions of Israel's delegated leadership must now more fully understand the bases of any such informed skepticism.

In essence, Israel is imperiled by compounding and inter-related existential threats that justify its fundamental nuclear posture, and that require a correspondingly purposeful strategic doctrine. This basic need exists well beyond any reasonable doubt. Without such weapons and doctrine, Israel could not expectedly survive over time, especially if certain neighboring regimes, amid expanding chaos, should soon become more adversarial, more *Jihadist*, and/or less risk-averse.

Incontestably, a purposeful nuclear doctrine could prove increasingly vital to coping with various more-or-less predictable strategic scenarios for Israel, that is, those believable narratives requiring preemptive action, and/or an appropriate retaliation.

Typically, military doctrine carefully describes how national forces should fight in various combat operations. The literal definition of "doctrine" derives from Middle English, from the Latin *doctrina*, meaning teaching, learning, and instruction. Though generally unrecognized, the full importance of doctrine lies not only in the several ways that it can animate and unify military forces, but also in the uniquely particular fashion that it can transmit certain desired "messages."

In other words, doctrine can serve an increasingly imperiled state as a critical form of *communication*, one directed to its friends, and also to its foes.

Israel can benefit from just such broadened understandings of doctrine. The principal security risks now facing Israel are really more specific than general or generic. This is because Israel's extant adversaries in the region will likely be joined, at some point, by: (1) a new Arab state of "*Palestine*