

# Diplomacy and Israel's Nuclear Posture

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More than ever before, Israel cannot rely upon diplomacy to meet its core security needs. Above all, Israel must soon prepare to suitably modify “deliberate nuclear ambiguity,” by offering increasingly precise calculations of timing, extent, and enemy irrationality.

Irrespective of any so-called “Trump Factor” in American foreign policy, there are no identifiable circumstances in which traditional great power diplomacy could reliably safeguard Israel from an eventual nuclear attack. For now, of course, Iran is not yet nuclear, and thus poses no immediate existential hazards. Over time, however, and notwithstanding the 14 July 2015 Vienna Agreement with Israel's most conspicuously ominous adversary, this specific nuclear threat could change dramatically.

This means that Israel must adequately prepare for such a

manifestly consequential change, and, inter alia, to modify (at least in certain determinably prudent increments) its historically “ambiguous” nuclear strategy.

The Vienna Agreement effectively concerns not only Iranian nuclearization but also variously reciprocal ambitions among selected Sunni Arab states. For one pertinent example, a predictably still-nuclearizing Iran would likely accelerate latent nuclear ambitions in Saudi Arabia, and quite possibly, in Egypt. Furthermore, such more-or-less expected regional breakouts could intersect in assorted complex ways with both state and sub-state militarization, and also with corollary terrorist aggressions.

The resultant “synergies,” which might include the unique creation of formidable state-sub-state or “hybrid” nuclear foes, could display various “cascading” effects, and, accordingly, turn out to appear unfathomably dense or hideously complicated. Israel’s strategic planners would also need to bear in mind an utterly core characteristic of all “synergistic” interactions; that is, the whole is effectively greater than the simple “arithmetic” sum of its parts. Here, of course, the “whole” would represent the tangibly cumulative enemy nuclear threat posed by state and sub-state adversaries.

In such a scenario, any countervailing Saudi (Sunni) nuclear capacity will have been made possible by Pakistan, a state that is fundamentally unstable, and which last year embraced an expressly tactical or “nuclear-war-fighting” concept of nuclear deterrence. This openly enlarged emphasis upon theater nuclear forces was intended primarily to enhance Islamabad’s deterrence credibility vis-à-vis Delhi; still, it has policy ramifications extending well beyond southwest Asia. Moreover, Islamabad’s changed nuclear emphasis is likely very different from nuclear deterrence strategies now presumably being fashioned in Israel.

There is more. Various threatening intersections of Saudi and

Iranian interests could become most probable and problematic wherever they would also link ISIS, Hezbollah, or al-Qaeda surrogate elements. To render such reasonably plausible geo-strategic intersections even more ominous, and perhaps more “opaque,” they could further be affected by an already emergent “Cold War II.” Oddly, and for at least several readily decipherable reasons, Riyadh has been extending certain collaborative overtures to Moscow, in essence, taking some genuinely novel steps toward cementing a unique but also unpredictable sort of alignment with the “other” superpower. Just as oddly, perhaps, there are indications that a Trump presidency may seek to reverse Cold War II, a potentially naive reversal that may first sound altogether promising for Israel and the United States, but could quickly turn out to represent a net strategic loss for both countries.

Mirroring its myriad threats, Israeli counter-measures will need to be similarly complex, and should involve an optimal assortment of interpenetrating remedies. Among other measured remedies, this doctrinally-based configuration of “force multipliers” should eventually include: (1) a calculated and controlled end to “deliberate nuclear ambiguity;” (2) recognizable enhancements of counter-value nuclear targeting doctrine; (3) incrementally-greater deployments of ballistic-missile defenses; and (4) a progressively greater reliance on selective sea-basing of national nuclear forces. It could also mean taking appropriately new steps to challenge an inevitable barrage of substantially shrill “nonproliferation” demands, both from the United Nations organization, and also from the wider international community.

For Israel, any significant compliance with allegedly legal demands for denuclearization could prove massively injurious, or even catastrophic. Indeed, even if all the involved enemy states were to remain entirely non-nuclear themselves, these long-standing adversaries, and also their terrorist proxies, could still find themselves in a palpably improved position to

militarily overwhelm Israel. Already, Hezbollah, the Shiite militia run from Tehran, and in league with both Moscow and Damascus, may control more offensive rockets than all of the European NATO countries combined.

Sunni ISIS (or certain of its various local surrogates), periodically launching rockets into southern Israel from the Egyptian Sinai, could sometime gain access to weapons-usable nuclear materials in Syria. Conceivably, such materials will have originated with the Israeli-destroyed Al Kibar reactor back in 2007. Of course, if Israel had never undertaken "Operation Orchard," Syrian terror groups now fighting Bashar al-Assad might now already have gained operational access to certain assembled Syrian nuclear weapons.

It is easy to understand Israel's Arab and Iranian enemies' recalcitrant insistence upon creating a non-nuclear Israel. Of course, should these Sunni and Shiite adversaries all remain verifiably willing to remain non-nuclear after the P5+1 agreement – a tall order indeed – their cumulative conventional, chemical and biological capabilities could still bring intolerable harms to Israel. In other words, without maintaining what Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, had originally conceived as a "great equalizer," the Jewish State could then need to face an immutably refractory principle of warfare. This is that, ultimately, "mass counts."

Israel, we needn't be reminded, has virtually no mass, the key argument for submarine-basing of some nuclear weapons.

In law, as well as in strategy, war and genocide need not be mutually exclusive. Even today, Palestinian and Iranian maps expose unhidden plans for a faith-driven genocide against "the Jews." Religiously, these contemplated crimes against humanity – or "incitements to genocide," in the more derivative language of the 1948 Genocide Convention – stem from the animating eschatologies of "sacred" violence.

With its own nuclear weapons, even if maintained as “deliberately ambiguous,” Israel could reasonably expect to deter a rational enemy’s unconventional attacks, and also most large conventional ones. Further, while securely holding such fearful weapons, Israel could still launch certain cost-effective non-nuclear preemptive strikes against an enemy state’s hard (military) targets. Without nuclear weapons, any such purely conventional expressions of anticipatory self-defense would likely presage only the onset of a much wider war.

The strategic rationale for any such under-explored nuclear argument is easy to explain. In essence, without a recognizable nuclear backup in its deterrence posture, there might no longer exist sufficiently compelling threats of an Israeli counter-retaliation. It follows that Israel’s nuclear arsenal actually represents a critically valuable impediment to regional nuclear war, a point that should very quickly be made plain to America’s new president.

In themselves, nuclear weapons are neither good nor evil. In some circumstances, especially in a world of structural international anarchy, they could serve as indispensable implements of stable military deterrence. Moreover, there does exist, under long-settled international law, a “peremptory” national right to employ or even fire nuclear weapons in order to survive. This expressly last-resort right is codified at the 1996 Advisory Opinion on Nuclear Weapons, an authoritative Opinion handed down by the U.N.’s International Court of Justice.

In sum, diplomacy has very substantial limits in assuring Israel’s national survival. Even following “Vienna’s” prohibitions of Iranian nuclearization, Israel has much to fear from Tehran. In this connection, if Iran’s religious leadership should ever choose to abandon the usual premises of rational behavior in world politics – that is, to forfeit the ordinary primacy of national survival – Jerusalem’s

exclusively defensive nuclear deterrence posture could quite literally fail.

Nonetheless, even if Iran should sometime become a nuclear suicide-bomber in macrocosm, Israel's only rational strategy, moving forward, ought still remain focused upon a suitably reciprocal enhancement of its always-vital nuclear deterrent.

There is more. Even if Israel's nuclear planners could reasonably assume that all enemy leaderships, including Iran, were expectedly rational, this would say nothing about the accuracy of the information used in their actual calculations. In matters of military strategy, strategists must steadfastly recall, rationality refers only to the intention of maximizing certain expressed values or preferences – most importantly, national survival. It does not suggest anything at all about whether the information being used by an enemy is either correct or incorrect.

Fully rational enemy leaderships could commit assorted errors in calculation leading them toward a conventional war, or, in the future, toward a nuclear war, with Israel. There are also several associated command and control issues that could sometime impel a perfectly rational adversary or alliance of adversaries to undertake intolerably risky nuclear behaviors. These issues include: (1) uncontrollable consequences of certain pre-delegations of launch authority; (2) presumptive deterrence-enhancing measures called “launch-on-warning” (alternatively, called “launch-upon-confirmed-attack”); and/or (3) recalling ongoing Pakistani instability, coup d'état.

“Everything is very simple in war,” says Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, “but the simplest thing is still difficult.” For Israel, deciphering the seemingly straightforward connections between international diplomacy and national nuclear strategy will actually present a staggering computational challenge. Nonetheless, this is still a challenge that can be met by taking appropriate steps to ensure that the small country's

basic security is continuously backed up by a fully comprehensive and refined strategic doctrine. More precisely, such more-or-less codified guidance should be fashioned to run the full operational gamut of tactical opportunity, ranging from certain always legally-available pre- and post-attack options of permissible self-defense, to certain other and always remaining residual threats of devastating nuclear reprisal.

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