

Israeli Security in a Second Cold War

To be sure, although the Soviet Union is long gone, a new Cold War is steadily emerging between the United States and Russia. For Israel, a beleaguered mini-state now seeking to survive amid unprecedented regional chaos, this return of superpower rivalry could signal either a substantial crisis of instability, or an opportunity for enhanced national security.

Which will it be? How, precisely, should this newly revived era of bipolarity best be deciphered and understood in Jerusalem? What might its successful “decoding” mean for the Jewish State’s critical military policies, and also for its derivative operational postures?

To answer these nuanced and generally difficult questions, Israeli analysts should first recall the primacy of context. Always, in seeking appropriate answers, the world must first be understood and examined as a system. Most importantly, in this metaphor, whatever happens in any one part of this system, will affect what happens in all or several of its other parts.

When a particular deterioration is marked, and begins to spread from one country to another, the effects can quickly undermine regional and global stability. When a deterioration is sudden and catastrophic, as it would be following the onset of unconventional war or unconventional terrorism, the effects could be prompt, and also potentially irremediable.

In the fashion of every other state in world politics, Israel will exist more or less precariously amid the hardening animosities of Cold War II. One way or another, any significant transformations of the larger international system, whether slow and piecemeal, or sudden and calamitous,

will inevitably impact the much smaller Israeli system. In the most blatantly obvious manifestation of this expected impact, Israel will have to reorient its core strategic planning, perhaps even toward informed contemplations of utterly worst-case scenarios.

Plausibly, the country's altering analytic focus here will need to be directed more toward a bewilderingly wide range of self-help security options, than on the more conspicuously favored kinds of international cooperation. Alternatively, however, depending upon exactly how any tightening bipolarity will compel Russia and the United States to reinvigorate their respective alliance commitments, Israel could wind up relying less upon self-help, and more upon newly expanded U.S., or even Russian, security guarantees.

Going forward, virtually any sorts of purposeful realignments are possible for Israel. Both Washington and Moscow are certain to notice that Israel, although smaller than San Bernardino County in California, represents a rare oasis of sanity and stability in an otherwise incoherent region. Over time, such awareness could conveniently allow Jerusalem to deal selectively with both superpowers on a security-maximizing basis. Undoubtedly, such an exceptional opportunity did not exist during "Cold War I."

There is more. Within Israel's particular decisional boundaries, diplomatic processes that are routinely premised on assumptions of enemy reason and rationality could sometime require fundamental reevaluation. In such complex and corollary calculations, Israel's subsequent judgments about "peace process" or "road map" expectations would not suddenly become less important, but they would now need to be made in more evident consequence of anticipated world-system changes. From the standpoint of Israel's overall security, any such reorientation of planning, from determinable portents of largely separate threats, to carefully calculated presumptions of interrelated or "synergistic" dangers, could provide a

modified or even fully transformed framework for strategic decision-making.

In the final analysis, the intellectual foundations of this critical framework must be discoverable in a prior willingness to extract policy options from the now-revived axis of competitive bipolarity. No doubt, Israel's particular reactions, as a system within a system, to corresponding worldwide and regional uncertainties, will sometime impact these expressions. For example, should Israel's leaders react to a presumptively unstoppable deterioration in world affairs by hardening their commitment to national self-reliance, including perhaps certain still-possible resorts to preemptive military operations, Israel's enemies could then respond, individually or collectively, in manifestly similar ways.

What are adversarial responses to Israel apt to look like? How, moreover, should Israel prepare to react to such more-or-less anticipated responses? This primary "strategic dialectic" should now be upgraded and reexamined by Israel's most capable strategic planners. During this difficult process, perceived relations between Washington and Moscow in Jerusalem could play a major role in shaping Israel's own security policies.

In the final analysis, Israel's strategic emphases will still need to be placed upon assorted preparations for deterrence, preemption, defense and war-fighting functions. Among other things, this could mean certain steady enhancements of ballistic missile defense (BMD), and also various recognizable movements away from the country's ongoing posture of "deliberate nuclear ambiguity." Expressly urgent, in this regard, will be the now obvious failure of diplomatic efforts to curb Iran's nuclear weapons program. For certain, the July 2015 Vienna agreement on Iran will have no meaningful impact upon the Islamic Republic's plainly irreversible commitment to producing nuclear weapons.

For Israel, the rekindling of Cold War between Washington and

Moscow will present a serious challenge. If, however, this challenge is purposefully accepted in Jerusalem, and accepted as an intellectual rather than political effort, the Jewish State's indispensable strategies of national survival will stand a better chance of tangible success. In this connection, it is still entirely possible that certain Cold War II consequences could unfold to Israel's overall strategic advantage, rather than to the advantage of its myriad and often inter-penetrating enemies.

Even here, however, it will first be necessary for Jerusalem to plan ahead, and to more fully examine the pertinent dynamics of Cold War II. A suitable starting point would be the growing mutuality of interest between Washington and Moscow in combating jihadist terrorism. Indeed, more than any other country on earth, Israel is positioned to counsel either one or both of the superpowers on the expected requirements of success in an evidently joint struggle. As it evolves in the months and years ahead, Cold War II could eventually prove to be an asset rather than liability for Israel's national security.

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