

# The Iranian Nuclear Threat and the Israeli Options

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After the American conquest of Iraq and the elimination of the threat of an Eastern Front against Israel, after Muammar Al-Qaddafi's decision to stop development of weapons of mass destruction, and after the considerable weakening of the Syrian military, only one potential strategic threat against Israel remains: the Iranian nuclear-programme. Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons will lead to major changes in the Middle East strategic balance, accompanied by consequently inevitable changes to Israel's national security concept in general, and to its nuclear policy in particular.

There are two schools of thought in Israel that have different perceptions of the Iranian threat. The first one is represented by most of the members of the government and of the Knesset (the Israeli parliament) who perceive Iran as a bitter ideological enemy that is determined to bring about the physical annihilation of Israel. This school does not believe that a regime change in Iran is possible in the foreseeable future. The clear conclusion is that Israel cannot live with an Iran that has military nuclear capabilities, because sooner or later Iran will use them against Israel.<sup>1</sup>

This perception, that the Iranian nuclear threat is of far-reaching significance, dangerous, and demands a response, is evidenced by the comments of senior policy-makers. 'Israel, and not only Israel, cannot accept a situation in which Iran will possess nuclear weapons, and we are making all the preparations required for situations of this kind', declared Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, on 29 November 2005, in the annual press conference with the newspaper editors committee.<sup>2</sup> 'Within a period of one or two years they [Iran] will have a bomb, and then we will have a new Middle East – threatening, black and dangerous', argued Yuval Steinitz, chairman of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, at the end of 2005.<sup>3</sup>

On 17 January 2006, Ehud Olmert, then deputized for hospitalized Prime Minister Sharon, declared that Israel was not prepared to reconcile itself to a nuclear-armed Iran.<sup>4</sup> Senior IDF officers also express anxiety regarding Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons, and regard this as a significant threat to Israel. For example, CGS Dan Halutz, in a talk to military correspondents on 7 January 2006, emphasized that 'it is sufficient to see the means the Iranian are developing for nuclear weapons delivery systems – this covers an area far greater than that of Israel. This ought to worry far more than the State of Israel.'<sup>5</sup> Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz continued the same trend in his speech at the Herzliya Conference, on 22 January 2006.

Israel will not be prepared to accept Iranian acquisition of nuclear weapons', he explained. In his opinion, although for the moment Israel is relying on

international diplomatic efforts directed against Tehran's nuclear program; it must prepare to defend itself, 'with all that this entails.'<sup>6</sup>

During his visit to the United States in May 2006, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told a joint meeting of the United States Houses of Congress that a 'nuclear armed Iran is an intolerable threat to the peace and security of the world', which 'cannot be permitted to materialize'.<sup>7</sup> In November 2006, Olmert declared that 'We cannot tolerate, we will not tolerate, those who challenge Israel's right to exist while actively seeking the catastrophic weapons to fulfill their goals'.<sup>8</sup> In an interview to Newsweek, in November 2006, the prime minister emphasized that 'It is absolutely intolerable for Israel to accept the threat of a nuclear Iran. I prefer not to discuss the Israeli options. Israel has many options.'<sup>9</sup> And on 25 April 2007, speaking in Jerusalem to Jewish activists from New York, he said that the threat of Iran's president to destroy the State of Israel is not something that can be tolerated.<sup>10</sup>

The second school of thought looks at Iran as a more complex entity with a policy that is influenced by many considerations, the ideological consideration being only one of them. According to this line of thinking, Iranian policies are motivated more by national interests and preservation of the regime considerations than by ideology. In the case of Israel, Iran is pursuing its ideological agenda because it serves its national interest of getting influence in the Arab world and a status of leadership in the Moslem world, and it helps the regime to retain its revolutionary image.<sup>11</sup> This school of thought is represented in the Israeli intelligence community by the Mossad, Israel's foreign intelligence agency, and has supporters in the Ministry of Defence and the National Security Council.

The intentions of this article are threefold. *First*, to examine the major implications of the remarks of those giving warning against the existential danger latent in a nuclear Iran. In order to understand the ramifications of Iranian acquisition of nuclear weapons we must examine how the risks are perceived by others, as well as Iran's own motives in the development of its nuclear programme, the interests that it intends to realize by means of nuclear weapons, and its future strategic intentions. Will the possession of nuclear weapons by the Iranian regime actually present such a grave threat to the security of Israel and of the Free World? *Second*, to analyse options open to Israel in response to a nuclear Iran will be displayed, and the advantages and disadvantages of each of them. *Third*, the possible regional influences of Iranian acquisition of nuclear weapons will be also analysed. Will a nuclear Iran mark the beginning of a process of nuclearization of additional countries in the Middle East?

### **Israeli Perceptions of the Iranian Threat**

Israeli threat perception is based on the extreme rhetoric of Iranian leaders, their support for terrorism against Israel, and the official Iranian policy of regarding Israel as a mortal enemy. Iran under the Islamic regime has gone so far as to reject Israel's right to exist. The hostility to Israel is embodied in ideological-religious concepts, and the conflict with it reflects the struggle of the Moslem

world that the Ayatollahs in Tehran profess to represent. For the current Iranian regime, based on the concepts formulated by the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Israel's existence causes injustice in three ways:

- a. Harm to the legitimate rights of the Palestinians.
- b. Oppression of Moslems under Israeli rule.
- c. Control by Israeli infidels over land sacred to Islam.

In addition there are, of course, the former 'sins' of Israel, which was an ally of the Shah, whose rule was regarded by Iranian religious leaders as the embodiment of evil. Israel also had close connections with the notorious Iranian secret police of the Shah's regime, the Savak, which engaged in the oppression of Islam in Iran.<sup>12</sup>

Israel's close relations with the United States caused Tehran to call it 'the little Satan' that joined forces with 'the great Satan', the US. In the eyes of the Iranian regime Israel is the colonial tool of the West, and its ambition is to expand in the Middle East, and even reach the border with Iran. As former Iranian President Ha'ashemi Rafsanjani explained: 'The aim is to plant an instrument in the region that will replace the old colonialism, but will carry out its tasks in a different guise. The region we are talking about stretches from the Nile to the Euphrates, or in other words, from the Suez Canal to the Persian Gulf.'<sup>13</sup> Ali Khamenai, the current leader of Iran, did not express any reservations when Hossein Shariatmadari, editor of the conservative Iranian daily *Kayhan*, affiliated with Khamanei, called in 17 July 2006, in his editorial, to 'wipe Israel off the map'. He added that:

There are many signs and portents indicating that 'the fateful day' is coming near. It is possible that this day ... has already begun ... The Muslim peoples and many other peoples think that, in global geopolitics, there is no such thing as the state of Israel, and that the [entity] which presently bears this name is a usurping and rootless state that has imposed its parasitic presence over the region and over Palestine with the support of the arrogant powers.<sup>14</sup>

'Assessing the significance of the Iranian threat to Israel has been, until now, relatively simple', argues Kam:

Iran's increased strength in conventional weapons did not pose a significant threat to Israel. Iran does not have the conventional military capability to attack Israel, and – except in the area of missiles – evidently will not achieve such capability within the next few years. From now on, however, the minute the Iranian will have the nuclear weapons, assessment of the Iranian threat will be much more complex and problematic. This new situation will create complex assessment problems that will in turn affect Israel's response options. The question of Iranian intentions will be even more complicated, primarily because Iran is governed by a fundamentalist Islamic regime: Will Iran use its strategic capability only for deterrence and defense – as it currently claims regarding the Shihab-3 missile – or also for aggression? Under what circumstances, if any, might it attack Israel? What might deter it from doing so?<sup>15</sup>

Regarding the nuclear programme, in parallel to its denial of any intention to develop nuclear weapons, senior officials in the Iranian regime argue that there is justification for countries of the Moslem world to develop such weapons as a counterweight to Israel's nuclear force. A statement in this matter was expressed by former Iranian President Rafsanjani in December 2001. 'If one day the Moslem world acquires weapons of the kind currently possessed by Israel, the strategy of the imperialists will come to a dead end. Because the activation of even a single nuclear bomb in Israel will destroy everything, while such a bomb will only cause damage to the Moslem world.'<sup>16</sup>

Rafsanjani expressed this idea even earlier, in a speech in Tehran in October 2000. He clearly stated that Iran believed it would come out the winner of a nuclear war. 'In a nuclear duel in the region, Israel may kill 100 million Muslims', the former Iranian president said. 'Muslims can sustain such casualties, knowing that, in exchange, there would be no Israel on the map.'<sup>17</sup> Banners with the slogan, 'Israel must be wiped off the map' in both Farsi and English, were hung from the Shahab-3 missiles put on a military parade in September 1999.<sup>18</sup>

Iran's President, Mahmud Ahmadinejad, worsened the situation existing between the two countries, by a series of extremist declarations. In October 2005, shortly after his election to the presidency, Ahmadinejad declared before participants in a 'World without Zionism' conference held in Tehran, that 'as the Imam [the Ayatollah Khomeini] said, Israel must be wiped off the map'.<sup>19</sup>

In December 2005 Ahmadinejad said in a press conference held at the end of the Islamic Conference Organization (OIC) convention, in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, that 'if Germany and Austria feel responsible for the Jewish Holocaust, they should give up some of their territory for Israel . . . You oppressed them, so give part of Europe for the Zionist regime so that they can set up any government they want.'<sup>20</sup> He added later:

Several European countries persist in saying that Hitler burnt millions of exploited Jews in furnaces. They are so persistent about this issue that if someone proves the opposite they convict him and send him to jail. Although we do not accept this accusation [regarding the annihilation of European Jews], let us assume that it is correct, and we ask the Europeans: Does the killing of exploited Jews by Hitler [justify] your support for a regime that has conquered Jerusalem? . . . Please give part of Europe and we will also support this . . .<sup>21</sup>

Ahmadinejad's remarks caused a renewed public debate regarding the military option of attacking the nuclear sites in Iran. For many people in the Israeli defence establishment the Iranian President's declarations formed decisive proof of the existential danger latent in a nuclear Iran, and recognition of the fact that there was no way to avoid taking action against it, even if this would have to be done by Israel itself. Such an approach was presented, for example, by Maj. Gen. (Res.) Amos Gilad, head of the political defence branch of the Ministry of Defence, as quoted by Reuters,<sup>22</sup> and by Isaac Ben-Israel, a retired major general, who heads Tel Aviv University's Security Studies Programme, who recently became a member of the Knesset.<sup>23</sup>

### Iranian Intentions as Viewed Outside Israel

However, not only senior members of the defence establishment and decision makers in Israel regard a nuclear Iran as a threat to the State's security. More and more policy-makers throughout the Western world have begun to accept the idea that the acquisition of nuclear weapons by Iran will present a danger to the Free World and will be liable to damage the strategic stability, not only of the Middle East, but of the whole world.

President George W. Bush, in a press conference held after his meeting with German Chancellor, Engele Merkel, on 13 January 2006, made it clear that Iranian possession of nuclear weapons 'would be unacceptable'. The president explained that 'the reason for this is that a nuclear armed Iran would present a grave threat to the security of the world'.<sup>24</sup> 'The possession of nuclear weapons by Iran will advance it towards the realization of its aim to destroy the State of Israel. The Iranian President has already said that the destruction of Israel is an important part of his agenda, and this is simply inconceivable', Bush added.<sup>25</sup>

Vice-President Richard Cheney emphasized in a TV interview that Iran is a paramount danger to world peace and to stability in the Middle East.<sup>26</sup> US Security of State Condoleezza Rice also clarified the US position when she stated that 'We do not intend to permit [Iran] to engage in technological development that can lead to nuclear weapons ... because no-one has faith in Iranians possessing nuclear technology'.<sup>27</sup>

Fears regarding Iranian nuclear weapons are shared not only by Israel, the US, or any other individual country', stated US State Department spokesman Sean McCormack. 'The acquisition of nuclear weapons by Iran will be will be an event causing instability in the Middle East and the rest of the world.'<sup>28</sup>

The Iranian nuclear programme remains an acute issue on the American foreign policy agenda, and it seems that the White House has no intention to give up its struggle for termination of the Iranian nuclear programme. For instance, on 15 August 2007, the State Department spokesman Sean McCormack told reporters:

We are confronting Iranian behavior across a variety of different fronts on a number of different 'battlefields' ... We are confronting Iran's behavior in arming and providing material support to those groups that are going after our troops. We confront them on the ground in Iraq ... We are confronting Iran diplomatically in the international arena with respect to their nuclear program.<sup>29</sup>

In August 2007, President Bush clarified again that for America the Iranian nuclear programme is regarded as a real threat to the Middle East and to the world. 'Iran's pursuit of technology that could lead to nuclear weapons threatens to put a region already known for instability and violence under the shadow of a nuclear holocaust', he told war veterans in Nevada. 'Iran's actions threaten the security of nations everywhere, and the United States is rallying friends and allies to isolate Iran's regime to impose economic sanctions. We will confront this danger before it is too late.'<sup>30</sup>

A nuclear Iran poses also a complicated challenge to the US, regarding the future of the nonproliferation regime, as Chubin and Litwak observe:

For the Bush administration, which maintains its intention to pursue nonproliferation strategies tailored to the particular circumstances of each case, Iran presents conditions that warrant a different policy from those applied to the other two members of the 'axis of evil'. The United States views, with reason, outlaw states that indulge in or sponsor terrorism, regional aggression or intimidation, domestic repression, and anti-Western postures as countries that pose the greatest threat if they acquire WMD capabilities.

Iran, however, is not a pariah state under UN sanction like Saddam Hussein's Iraq, nor is Iran a hermit-like failed state like North Korea. Iran's nuclear program is far less developed than that of North Korea but more advanced than that of Iraq prior to the 2003 war (although Saddam was closer to acquiring nuclear weapons prior to the 1991 Persian Gulf War than he was before the latest conflict).<sup>31</sup>

British Prime Minister Tony Blair estimated that the Iranian nuclear programme is so dangerous that all means should be employed to counter it. 'I think that the first thing that must be done is to ensure agreement [between members of the International Atomic Energy Agency] in which reference will be made to the [UN] Security Council ... and afterwards we must decide on which measures to take, and we of course do not rule out any means.'<sup>32</sup>

Recently, David Miliband, new UK's foreign secretary has warned that Iran has no right to spark a nuclear arms race in the Middle East. Miliband said the West was making a 'very clear offer' to allow Tehran to develop non-military nuclear power, but said the country 'doesn't have the right to undermine the stability of its neighbours'.<sup>33</sup>

The countries of the European Union expressed in January 2006 their concern at Iran's intention to resume its suspended nuclear activities, and in a joint announcement stated that 'The action of the Iranian government, at a time when consideration is still being given to the possibility of renewing negotiations with it, represents continuing erosion of international belief in the peaceful intentions of its nuclear program, and causes grave anxiety to the entire international community'.<sup>34</sup>

In January 2006 the foreign ministers of Britain, France, and Germany declared that if Iran were to continue to act in its nuclear programme in the current direction 'Central Asia and the Middle East, the most volatile regions in the world, are liable to become extremely unstable'.<sup>35</sup>

Even in Australia Foreign Minister Alexander Downer expressed his concern at the Iranian nuclear programme. 'We are very worried by this development', he emphasized on 10 January 2006 when referring to Iran's decision to resume the nuclear activities that had previously been suspended.<sup>36</sup>

Nuclear Iran is perceived by the French policy-makers as a threat that even justified the a military attack to terminate the Iranian nuclear programme. In his first major foreign policy speech as president of France, Nicolas Sarkozy said on 27 August 2007 that Iran could be attacked militarily if it did not live up to its international obligations to curb its nuclear programme.<sup>37</sup>

### Timing and Chain Reactions

One of the problematic issues regarding the handling of the Iranian nuclear issue is the predicted timetable for the Iranian nuclear programme. It transpires that the Western intelligence organizations lack information that will enable them to estimate properly the status of the Iranian nuclear programme, and the date of completion of development of a nuclear weapon. The IDF Intelligence Branch claimed at the beginning of the 1990s that within five years Iran could possess nuclear weapons. Since then more than 15 years have elapsed and the development of nuclear weapons in Iran has not yet been completed.<sup>38</sup> The estimates of the American intelligence community are different, and predict that by the end of the decade, or the middle of the next decade (three to eight years), Iran could complete the development of the bomb.<sup>39</sup>

Considerable importance is of course attached to the estimates of Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons regarding the policy that should be adopted to counter it. Consequently a dispute exists between the policy-makers in Israel and the US regarding the urgency of the steps to be taken against Iran. While the Israelis emphasize the short time available to those wishing to prevent Iran acquiring nuclear weapons, the Americans tend to emphasize the fact that considerable time still exists for a variety of activities, including diplomatic ones.<sup>40</sup>

In his testimony on Iran before the Senate Intelligence Committee on 2 February 2006, Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte estimated that if Iran continues on its current path, it 'will likely have the capability to produce a nuclear weapon within the next decade'.<sup>41</sup>

Israeli Intelligence has made increasing use in its estimates of a different term: *the point of no return*. This means the point of time at which Iran will acquire all the technological know-how, and the equipment, required to complete the development of nuclear weapons without external aid. On 30 November 2005, the head of the Intelligence Branch, Maj. Gen. Aharon Ze'evi-Farkash, participated in a meeting of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee and emphasized that 'if by the end of March 2006 the international community does not succeed in halting by diplomatic means the Iranian efforts to manufacture a nuclear bomb, there will no longer be any point in diplomatic activities and it will be possible to say that the international attempts to thwart the Iranian efforts have failed'. Furthermore, Ze'evi-Farkash indicated that the thwarting of Iranian efforts by diplomatic means would be in danger when Iran commences the stage of nuclear enrichment, 'the stage of no return'.<sup>42</sup>

However, it appears that the problem with these intelligence assessments is that they are too flexible, and it seems that they are frequently presented as part of Israel's propaganda efforts, and as an attempt to urge the international community to act in a more determined manner against Iran. For example, precisely two years before the head of the Intelligence Branch's appearance in the Knesset, the then Defence Minister, Shaul Mofaz, declared that 'in the course of 2004 Iran will pass the point of no return'.<sup>43</sup> Recently, the Mossad chief Meir Dagan, in a meeting of the Knesset Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, rejected talk of a 'point of no return', saying that 'such a concept does not exist'.<sup>44</sup> At that meeting Dagan estimated that Iran will acquire nuclear weapons in 2009–10.<sup>45</sup>

One of the greatest fears regarding the influence of Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons is the possibility that this would lead to the proliferation of nuclear weapons amongst its neighbours in the region. This disquieting direction of development was indicated by Henry Kissinger, the former US Secretary of State, who began his career as an expert on nuclear questions:

Another aspect: In the event of it [Iran] acquiring nuclear weapons its self-confidence will increase and it will intensify its subversive-revolutionary position, that is intended to expand its influence in several close circles, such as the Persian Gulf, as well as more remote ones. But the strongest shock wave, the greatest danger, is that the acquisition of nuclear weapons by Iran will open the floodgates to the proliferation of nuclear weapons to other countries. It will cause a chain reaction.<sup>46</sup>

In this regard, Henry Sokolski emphasizes that Iran's continued insistence that it acquired its nuclear capabilities legally under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) would, if unchallenged, encourage its neighbours (including Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, Turkey, and Algeria) to develop nuclear options of their own by emulating Iran's example, by overtly declaring possession (in Israel's case) or by importing nuclear weapons (in Saudi Arabia's case).<sup>47</sup>

Saudi Arabia is very worried by the new situation that will form for it a catalyst to evaluate the options at its disposal. Early in 2004, senior Saudi officials announced they were studying the possibility of acquiring or 'leasing' nuclear weapons from China or Pakistan. Egypt, with its regional aspirations, will find difficulty in coming to terms with such a situation, and already announced its plans to develop a large nuclear desalination plant and is reported recently to have received sensitive nuclear technology from Libya. Syria, meanwhile, is interested in uranium enrichment. Some intelligence sources believe Damascus already may be experimenting with centrifuges.<sup>48</sup> And Algeria is in the midst of upgrading its second large research reactor facility.<sup>49</sup> As one regional analyst sees it:

We don't want a nuclear arms race in the region. We are very worried and fearful', said the General Secretary of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Abdul Rahman Al-Atiya, at the end of the meeting in mid December 2005 of the six heads of state participating in the GCC. 'I think that this is the time for an agreement that will lead to a nuclear-free Persian Gulf region.'<sup>50</sup>

In addition to the fear that these countries would turn to the nuclear option, it is also possible that the regime in Turkey would reach the conclusion that a nuclear Iran is a threat obligating the Turks to develop nuclear weapons.<sup>51</sup> A Turkish decision to acquire nuclear weapons in response to Iran's nuclear arsenal would further increase Iraq's incentive to resurrect its nuclear weapons programmes.<sup>52</sup>

Chubin emphasizes that broader issues include the possible breakdown of the non-proliferation regime through further proliferation and recognition that the NPT may allow a state to get perilously close to acquiring nuclear weapons. The need to plug gaps in the treaty and to strengthen enforcement poses enormous political problems in the international system.<sup>53</sup>

The difficulty posed by states seeking technology that brings them close to a bomb is not simply one of evil outlaw states. The NPT was always Janus-faced, at once promoting nuclear technology (Article IV) and nonproliferation of nuclear weapons. The problem, as Albert Wohlstetter remarked in the 1970s, is that the technologies are essentially the same. The spread of nuclear technology, legitimate and even encouraged by NPT rules can bring states close to a weapons capability. Without diversion and 'without plainly violating their agreement', states 'can come within hours of a bomb'.

'The problem is that tightening the treaty without renegotiating', Chubin argues:

... it will be difficult, not least in light of the discontent with the treaty on the part of many non-nuclear-weapons states. If ad hoc approaches are taken, there is the issue of drawing the line: Who is to decide where the line on such technologies is drawn, who is included and who excluded, and on what criteria? The problem is compounded by the possibility of future energy crises and environmental concerns about global warming, which may indicate the revival of nuclear power. Increased interest in nuclear power would make controlling technologies more controversial politically. Iran's ambiguous quest for nuclear technology thus unfolds at a time and place of great sensitivity. By seeking this technology – while claiming formal adherence to the treaty, using diplomacy, and adopting the language of a victimized non-nuclear-weapons state simply seeking its due under Article IV of the treaty – Iran tests both the treaty and its supporters.<sup>54</sup>

Iran's acquisition of the bomb would threaten the viability of the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA): unlike India, Israel, and Pakistan, Iran did sign the NPT and now puts the treaty's enforcers in a position of having to uphold its terms.<sup>55</sup>

Regarding the influence of a nuclear Iran on the international system and the non-proliferation regime, Perkovich and Manzanero claim that almost no literature has emerged to discuss how Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons would affect the international system beyond the Middle East. Discussion has tended to focus on potential knock-on effects in the Persian Gulf and Middle East (i.e. Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt, and Israel), to the exclusion of broader implications.<sup>56</sup>

### **Israel's Options in the Face of Nuclear Iran**

The acquisition of nuclear weapons by Iran will obligate a substantive change in Israel's national security policy. A nuclear threat by a hostile country must be regarded as an existential one, obligating different preparations on Israel's part, in both the operational and conceptual fields. Evaluation of the options available to Israel reveals seven alternatives. In the near future, Israeli decision makers will have to decide whether to adopt one of these options or to adopt a mix of options:

1. A preventive military operation.
2. Retention of the existing policy (ambiguity).

3. Reliance on the protection of an American nuclear umbrella.
4. Negotiations with Iran regarding disarmament and inspection arrangements.
5. Passive defence.
6. Active defence.
7. Unconcealed nuclear deterrence.

### *A Preventive Military Operation*

The proponents of the military option mean a preemptive strike, or in other words, an attack on the Iranian nuclear programme sites before completion of the development of the nuclear weapons. Preemption and prevention were an important part of the security discourse in Israel since the inception of the state of Israel.<sup>57</sup>

After the Israeli attack on the Iraqi nuclear reactor, Osiraq, in 1981, and based mostly on the Israeli government statements, scholars and politicians developed the notion that Israel had adopted a comprehensive and all encompassing preventive counter proliferation doctrine sometimes referred to as 'the Begin Doctrine'.<sup>58</sup> Right after the attack on Osiraq, the Israeli government issued a statement in which the new 'doctrine' can be traced: 'under no circumstances would we allow the enemy to develop weapons of mass destruction against our nation; we will defend Israel's citizens, in time, with all the means at our disposal'.<sup>59</sup>

Later that year, Israel's then Minister of Defence and later Prime Minister Ariel Sharon emphasized in a public address: 'The third element in our defense policy for the 1980s is our determination to prevent confrontation states from gaining access to nuclear weapons. Israel cannot afford the introduction of the nuclear weapon. For us, it is not a question of balance of terror but a question of survival. We shall therefore have to prevent such a threat at its inception.'<sup>60</sup>

Recently, when asked, in an interview in Germany's *Der Spiegel* magazine if he would not rule out a military strike against Tehran, Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, replied: 'I rule nothing out'.<sup>61</sup>

The model referred to by the supporters of a military operation is the attack on the Iraqi reactor, Osiraq. They argue that just as the destruction of the reactor near Baghdad halted the Iraqi nuclear programme for a protracted period, the very same action should be taken in the Iranian case.<sup>62</sup>

However, there is a great difference between the Iraqi and the Iranian cases. The Osiraq reactor – a highly visible and vulnerable target – was the centrepiece of Iraq's nuclear programme, and its destruction set the effort several years back.<sup>63</sup> And indeed after the attack the Iraqis abandoned the Plutonium track, and when they decided to resume the nuclear programme, they based it on enrichment of uranium by a number of methods.<sup>64</sup>

The Iranians learnt the lesson of the Israeli Air Force attack on Baghdad and dispersed the effort to develop nuclear weapons over numerous sites throughout the country. In contrast to the situation in Iraq, in which the development effort was concentrated in a single reactor, the Iranians decided to diversify the channels of nuclear development.<sup>65</sup> They engaged in uranium enrichment by means of centrifuges in an

installation located secretly in Natanz. They set up a factory for the production of heavy water in Arak, and constructed secret laboratories in the 'Nuclear Research Center' in a Tehran suburb in the guise of a factory for 'electric goods' (Kalaye Electric facility).<sup>66</sup> A significant part of these installations are located underground, well protected against attacks from the air. According to one intelligence source, Iran is estimated to have up to 70 sites that are dedicated to nuclear development.<sup>67</sup>

One of the obstacles facing a military operation directed at Iranian nuclear sites is the lack of intelligence. It is not clear if Israeli, or American, Intelligence agencies possess information about all the nuclear sites in Iran. The information about two important sites, in Natanz and in Arak, became known to the world thanks to information supplied by Iranian exiles.<sup>68</sup> According to Fitzpatrick, Western intelligence knew about Natanz and Arak before the information provided by the exiles, but could not reveal.<sup>69</sup>

Iran long has had considerable success in concealing its nuclear activities from US intelligence analysts and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors. (The latter recently warned against assuming the IAEA could find all of Iran's illicit uranium enrichment activities.)<sup>70</sup> As it is, Iran already could have hidden all it needs to reconstitute a bomb programme, assuming its known declared nuclear plants were hit.<sup>71</sup>

Some observers, like Allison, argue that Iran is likely to have a parallel, covert nuclear programme that is as advanced – or possibly more advanced – than the known programme monitored by the IAEA. If this is true, a strike against Iran's known facilities would not significantly delay its development of nuclear weapons.<sup>72</sup> So, targeting Iran's known nuclear facilities risks leaving other covert facilities and Iran's nuclear cadre of technicians untouched.<sup>73</sup>

An additional obstacle is the protection of the nuclear sites. There are doubts regarding the capabilities of destroying some, and almost certainly the most critical, of them. Even the bombs purchased from the US, known as 'bunker busters', will be of no use against deeply buried targets.<sup>74</sup>

In September 2004, Israel announced that it would purchase approximately 5,000 precision-guided munitions from the United States, including about 500 equipped with the 2,000 lb class BLU-109 penetrating warhead. More recently, Israel has received approval to purchase 100 precision-guided munitions equipped with the 5,000 lb class BLU-113 penetrating warhead. After the July 2006 conflict with Hezbollah, delivery of these bombs has apparently been expedited, and they could be rapidly integrated into the IAF.<sup>75</sup>

The problem is that conventional American weapons can penetrate up to 30 feet of hardened materials or 100 feet of earth, but some of the Iranian facilities are reportedly buried at depths of up to 200 feet. That problem is compounded by the fact that Iran has constructed most of its facilities under alternating layers of earth and cement that have been specifically designed to absorb the impact of deep-penetration bombs.

Michael Levi, for instance, argues that 'the American GBU-28 weapon – the so-called bunker buster – can pierce about 23 feet of concrete and 100 feet of soil. Unless the cover over the Natanz lab is almost entirely rock, bunker busters should be able to reach it. That said, some chance remains that a single strike would be

unsuccessful.<sup>76</sup> However, satellite images of the Natanz facility indicate that two large centrifuge facilities are buried under a mix of reinforced concrete and soil at a depth of at least 75 feet, beyond the range of America's bombs.<sup>77</sup>

An additional obstacle is the Iranian ground-based integrated air defence system. The Iranian armed forces have invested heavily in developing a decentralized architecture of mobile air defence platforms that could present the most serious threat to the Israeli aircraft because of their stealth and relative command autonomy. Recently, the Iranians purchased the sophisticated Tor M1 9M330 Air Defence System from Russia. The improved performance of this defence system would present additional challenges for an Israeli air strike.<sup>78</sup>

Iran's air defence system would require a substantial suppression effort, involving strikes on command centre, radar networks, and a largely unmapped web of mobile and fixed surface-to-air missile batteries.<sup>79</sup>

Since Israel has no aircraft carriers and it cannot use airbases in other Middle East states, its operational capabilities are reduced when the targets are located far from its territory. It is also highly unlikely Turkey and India, although Israel has some military relationships with them, would let Israel use their territories for the purpose of attacking Iran's nuclear infrastructure.<sup>80</sup>

Based on the past performance of the Israeli Air Force (IAF), and the deployment of its aircraft, it is possible to determine that at long ranges (targets in Iran are in the range of 1,500–2,000 km), the IAF is not capable of a sustained air campaign against a full array of targets.<sup>81</sup>

The conclusion is that Israel could attack only a few Iranian targets and not as part of a sustainable operation over time, but as a one-time surprise operation. In other words, even a successful attack on the reactor in Bushehr and other sites may only delay the completion of the development of the bomb for not a long time.<sup>82</sup>

In addition to these obstacles to exercising the military option, Israel should be considered the price, of the expected Iranian retaliation, that it is liable to pay for a military operation. First, the political price. An attack against a sovereign state that had not declared war on Israel, and had not engaged in belligerent activities, is liable to lead to international pressure on Israel and even to the imposition of various sanctions. Second, a more negative result is liable to be the absolute cessation of the pressure applied by the international community against Iran regarding its nuclear programme. Third, the price is liable to take the form of escalation of military operations against Israel. The Iranians would have justified grounds for attacking targets in Israel by means of their ballistic missiles. A military attack would also give Tehran a *casus belli* to rally Islamic Jihadists to wage war against the United States and its allies more directly.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, senior people in the Iranian regime have begun threatening to carry out a ballistic attack against Israel if Iran were to be attacked.<sup>84</sup>

Iran's Defence Minister Ali Shamkhani told reporters after a 25 September 1998 military parade that Iran would strike 'in a way the Israelis cannot imagine' in the event Israel should launch a preemptive attack on Iran. 'Today, we are much stronger than in the past. The most clear example is the Shahab-3. It will make the Israelis ponder about putting an end to the arms race one day', he said.<sup>85</sup>

In December 2003, Iran's Air Force Commander General Seyed Reza Pardis, said in response to statements by Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz that if Israel attacks Iran it will be 'digging its own grave'.<sup>86</sup>

Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume that Iran's response would also take the form of increased terrorist attacks against Israeli and Jewish, and probably US and Western, targets throughout the world. Another field in which Iran is liable to respond and demand a high price from Israel is through the Hizballah. This Shiite organization, whose members are deployed in Southern Lebanon, has left with several thousand Katyushas and rockets, after the August 2006 war with Israel. In August 2007 Defence Minister Ehud Barak said that Hezbollah has about 20,000 rockets and missiles of various ranges, more than it did prior to last summer's war in Lebanon.<sup>87</sup>

The rockets are of a variety of ranges, including those capable of hitting targets in central Israel (more than 100 km from the Lebanese border). An Israeli military operation against Iran would grant legitimacy to the Iranians to employ the Hizballah against Israel.<sup>88</sup> During the 2006 war, Hezbollah fired thousands of rockets indiscriminately and at times deliberately at civilian areas in northern Israel, killing at least 39 civilians. They struck three hospitals, an elementary school in Kiryat Yam, and a post office in Haifa. Hezbollah's rocket campaign crippled economic activity and daily life in much of northern Israel, forcing several hundred thousand civilians either to flee south or to hide in shelters and 'safe rooms'.<sup>89</sup>

Forth, the final outcome of diplomatic negotiations over Iran's nuclear programme is uncertain; although the chances of a successful result are very slim, attack might only harden Iran's resolve to continue its nuclear programme.<sup>90</sup>

As mention above, when the IAF destroyed the Osiraq reactor in Baghdad in 1981 the 'Begin Doctrine' was conceived. The problem is that what could be done and achieved in Iraq 20 years ago is no longer possible.<sup>91</sup>

This analysis does not, of course, rule out the possibility of an American military operation. The US possess the capability of carrying out an operation from the air while maintaining continuity of flights for a protracted time. This capability, which is not possessed by the IAF, can permit repeated attacks on sites throughout Iran, and in this way achieve better results than those that can be obtained by means of a one-time attack (that is the reasonable military option possessed by Israel).<sup>92</sup>

#### *Retention of the Existing Policy (Ambiguity)*

One of the options, which has proved itself until now, is reliance on a policy of nuclear ambiguity. The success of this policy in the deterrence of Arab countries has been quite impressive. Although the deterrence was opaque, Israel's enemies believed in it, and were deterred.

For example, during the Yom Kippur War, Egypt and Syria planned an all-out war with limited territorial aims. The assumption is that the reason for these limitations was the fear of an Israeli nuclear response if the Egyptian and Syrian armies were to approach or cross the green line borders.<sup>93</sup>

It seems that even in the 1991 Gulf War Saddam Hussein was deterred from launching missiles with chemical warheads because of his fear of an Israeli nuclear

response.<sup>94</sup> Support for this assumption can be found in the statement of General Hussein Kamel, Saddam's son-in-law, who deserted to Jordan in August 1995. Kamel, who was the preeminent military industries official and a fundamental player in Iraq's efforts to procure weapons of mass destruction, was asked during his interrogation in Jordan why missiles with chemical warheads were not launched against Israel. 'We were afraid of an Israeli nuclear response', replied the Iraqi general.<sup>95</sup>

However, despite the success until now of the policy of ambiguous nuclear deterrence, it seems that Israel cannot continue to rely on it if Iran acquires nuclear weapons. This is because the policy of ambiguity leaves too many gray areas. The opponent, Iran in this case, cannot know with certainty what the red lines are and when he is risking an Israeli nuclear response. Since the price of a nuclear attack on Israel is insufferable as far as Israel is concerned, there must be a policy of deterrence that leaves no room for misunderstandings. Ambiguity can be a successful policy in the face of non-nuclear threats, since even if the ambiguous policy fails the price paid by Israel will be bearable.<sup>96</sup>

#### *Reliance on the Protection of an American Nuclear Umbrella*

The idea is to award Israel a status similar to that of NATO countries, where their deterrence stance against their nuclear opponents relied on the American nuclear umbrella. This was based on Article 5 of the NATO treaty, according to which an attack on one of the member countries would be regarded as an attack on all member countries.<sup>97</sup>

The literature on deterrence refers to this category of deterrence as 'extended deterrence'. Huth defines this deterrence as 'A confrontation in which the policy-makers of one state (*defender*) threaten the use of force against another state (*potential attacker*) in an attempt to prevent that state from using military force against an ally – or territory controlled by an ally (*protégé*) – of the defender'.<sup>98</sup>

The Israeli decision makers will have to ask the question, will an American extended deterrence work in the Middle East, and in the case of Iran? The answer seems to be not so encouraging.

'In the Asian theater, extended deterrence has been effective', argues Kathleen J. McInnis, 'and the United States possesses some decent options for ensuring its effectiveness in the future. The long-standing commitment of the United States to the survival of democratic states in the region, reinforced by security treaties with Japan and South Korea, has created a great deal of U.S. political credibility in the region.' But, McInnis continues, 'U.S. relationships in the Middle East, however, have a strikingly different character, more akin to hesitant engagement than to Washington's well-established partnerships in Asia. A rising tide of Islamic fundamentalism, coupled with growing anti-U.S. sentiment, has strained these tenuous relations.'<sup>99</sup>

'Iranian nuclear capabilities would change the perceptions of the military balance in the region and could pose serious challenges to the [United States] in terms of deterrence and defense', stated Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Chair Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia during a testimony before his committee on Iran.<sup>100</sup>

'A U.S. extended deterrent policy in the Middle East', concludes McInnis,

... would lack credibility, not due to a lack of physical capability or presence in the region, but rather as a result of the fragility of U.S. relations with its allies in the region, creating a uniquely dangerous situation . . . Unlike in Asia, where the U.S. deterrent umbrella is more credible, in the Middle East the Iranian proliferation problem presents a different set of challenges. Not only do Iranian connections with terrorist organizations significantly raise fears of nuclear terrorism, but state-based proliferation is more dangerous in this already volatile region. Both concerns present significant, long-term challenges to U.S. security and involvement in the region, especially as extended deterrence may not succeed in assuring regional allies.<sup>101</sup>

Stein examines the concept of American extended deterrence outside Europe, and tries to conclude on its credibility in the Middle East. She finds that 'the strategy has been both overvalued and badly used as a basic instrument of conflict management'.<sup>102</sup>

The latent problem in this option is of a dual nature. First, the United States must agree to award Israel such a status, and it is not at all clear if there will be readiness for such a commitment on the part of the American administration. Second, based on Israel's historical experience regarding reliance on other countries for protection of its defence interests, it is doubtful if any Israeli leadership would be prepared to base its policy of deterrence against nuclear weapons on American promises. In Israel people have still not forgotten the evasion by the American administration in May–June 1967 of their commitments that they gave in 1957 after Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula to guarantee Israeli freedom of navigation in the Straits of Tiran.<sup>103</sup>

There is another problem, embodied in this option, regarding the credibility of an American nuclear threat against Iran. In the event that nuclear deterrence fails, the United States would have to make good on its nuclear threat and retaliate with nuclear weapons to cause most likely the end of the regime in Tehran, but at the unacceptable moral cost of thousands to millions of innocent Iranian civilian lives. Massive and tightly targeted conventional force retaliation offers a profoundly more moral and strategically effective deterrent, because the threat is more credible than nuclear weapons response, in light of the American restraint in inflicting civilian casualties in numerous conflicts since the end of the Cold War.<sup>104</sup> Israeli decision makers could not allow themselves to base the Israeli deterrence against a nuclear destructive blow on American deterrence posture which is not credible.

#### *Negotiations with Iran Regarding Disarmament and Inspection Arrangements*

This option is of course quite attractive, but the chances of its being realized are negligible. As long as there are no direct channels of communication between Israel and Iran, and as long as Iranian determination exists for completion of the development of nuclear weapons, there are no chances of reaching agreement with the regime in Tehran regarding the cessation of activities in the nuclear programme. Discussion, between Israel and Iran, of the inspection arrangements and of disarmament agreements is unrealistic at this stage.

Another course of action was recommended by the NPEC's (Nonproliferation Policy Education Center) working group on Iran. It called to 'Encourage Israel to initiate a Middle East nuclear restraint effort that would help isolate Iran as a regional producer of fissile materials'. According to this recommendation

Israel should announce that it will unilaterally mothball (but not yet dismantle) Dimona, and place the reactor's mothballing under IAEA monitoring. At the same time, Israel should announce that it is prepared to dismantle Dimona and place the special nuclear material it has produced in 'escrow' in Israel with a third trusted declared nuclear state, e.g., the United States. It should make clear, however, that Israel will only take this additional step when at least two of three Middle Eastern nations (i.e., Algeria, Egypt, or Iran) follow Israel's lead by mothballing their own declared nuclear facilities that are capable of producing at least one bomb's worth of plutonium or highly enriched uranium in 1 to 3 years.<sup>105</sup>

The chances that Israel will adopt this recommendation are also negligible.

Iran's negotiating record with the IAEA shows that the only nuclear bargain it finds of interest is one that runs out the clock, playing on the delusions of the wilfully naïve and the appeasers until Iran has enriched enough uranium for a modest arsenal. France, Britain, and Germany have further encouraged Iran toward intransigence by allowing it to break the IAEA seals on centrifuge production equipment with impunity.<sup>106</sup>

Another potential course of action is the support of Israel of an American–Iranian dialogue. This dialogue can moderate the behaviour of the Iranian regime and restrain the threat that emanates from it. Ultimately, even Iran's attitude toward Israel might be moderated. However, Israel should condition its support of this dialogue by insisting that the American administration adhere to its own conditions for improving relations with Iran: the suspension of Iran's weapons of mass destruction programmes, its involvement in terrorism, and its opposition to the peace process. During the course of the dialogue, Washington may weaken its stance regarding these conditions, but the possible gains of such a dialogue justify the risk. Through such contacts, the possibility of an Iranian–Israeli dialogue might also develop.<sup>107</sup>

However, such a dialogue will face difficulties, based on the fundamental mistrust between Iran and US. 'What are the prospects for such bilateral negotiations?' asks Patrick Clawson.

First, The United States has made efforts to negotiate with Iran for many years ... though these efforts have achieved only modest progress ... Second, can Washington allay Tehran's main concern: that the U.S. agenda is regime change, and that any negotiations would therefore be a case of 'the lamb negotiating with the wolf', as Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has put it? Iran feels that even if it can reach an agreement with the United States on one issue, such as Hizballah, the Americans will just raise another issue ... It does not matter how many times U.S. ambassador John Bolton states before the UN that Washington's policy is not 'regime change' but 'change in

regime behavior' – Iran's political elite do not believe this claim because their fears are based on a pattern of U.S. action that will almost certainly continue in the near term.<sup>108</sup>

There are researchers and politicians who believe that a nuclear-free zone could be the best answer to proliferation in the Middle East.<sup>109</sup> Although the idea seems to be very tempting, the current situation and developments in the Middle East make this option not feasible, at least in the foreseeable future.

One of the potential developments that might take place in the future is the emergence of the concept known in the literature as *deterrence and reassurance*. Since the probability that this development will occur in the foreseeable future is very slim, the discussion of it is beyond the scope of this article.<sup>110</sup>

### *Passive Defence*

This option refers to the construction of atomic shelters for the entire population in Israel, or for most of it. This approach is not realistic both because of the tremendous cost and because of its irrelevance regarding preparations in the face of a real nuclear threat. After all, if a surprise nuclear attack is made, a significant part of the population will have no time to reach the shelters and will be annihilated. The concept of passive defence was an important element in American strategic thinking from the end of the 1950s until the middle of the 1960s, but it was then abandoned because of the above considerations.<sup>111</sup>

### *Active Defence*

The Israeli defence establishment has already taken a decision to exercise this option, and has based it on the Arrow anti-missile system. Although at the beginning of the development of the Arrow the intention was to develop the system as an answer to conventional missiles, the concept changed, and in recent years it states that the principal justification for the development of the Arrow system is the need to counter nuclear missiles possessed by Iran.<sup>112</sup>

For some time a sharp public debate has been conducted in the US regarding defence against missiles, in which arguments have been presented for and against the development of ballistic missile defence systems. Use may be made of the major points presented in this debate for the purpose of analysis of the Israeli option for development and deployment of a defensive system against nuclear missiles.<sup>113</sup> A detailed analysis of all the arguments for and against is beyond the scope of this article, and we shall consequently focus only on the major critical points relevant to an analysis of the option of active defence against a nuclear Iran.

The major argument against reliance on active defence in the case of a nuclear missile threat was formulated in the 1960s by the US Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara. He argued that the attempt to defend against Soviet missiles was ineffective because no defence system could provide hermetic defence, and consequently the price that the US would be forced to pay in the event of a Soviet nuclear attack would be insufferable. The results of research performed by the US Army at McNamara's request indicated that in the event of a Soviet missile attack and the use of effective

American defence systems, 'only' 60 million Americans would be killed. The Secretary of Defence rejected the view held by the American defence establishment, that this was better than no defence at all, which would lead to the deaths of about 200 million Americans.

McNamara formulated a new concept, according to which the avoidance of deploying defensive systems would produce strategic stability between the two super-powers. The clear knowledge by each side that it would certainly be annihilated, even if it succeeded in surprising its rival with a missile attack, formed a deterrent against the use of its missiles. In this way the American Secretary of Defence succeeded in convincing the Soviets that it was preferable to abandon active defence systems and rely on mutual deterrence for preventing the other side from launching his missiles. In this way the concept of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) was formulated, and in 1972 the two super-powers signed the ABM Treaty, which specified that both of them were willingly giving up the deployment of active anti-missile defence systems. This policy formed the basis for the strategic stability from that time until the end of the Cold War.<sup>114</sup>

Despite the numerous differences between the relations, the scale, and the conditions that existed between the two super-powers during the Cold War, and those in the Middle East, it is possible to adopt the major principles of the concept formulated by McNamara and apply them to the Israeli–Iranian situation.

We can also use Waltz's observation, regarding the disadvantages of defence against a nuclear threat: 'Defense and deterrence are often confused. One frequently hears statements like this: "A strong defense in Europe will deter a Russian attack". What is meant is that a strong defence will dissuade Russia from attacking. Deterrence is achieved not through the ability to defend but through the ability to punish.'

Purely deterrent forces provide no defence. The message of a deterrent strategy is this: 'Although we are defenceless, if you attack we will punish you to an extent that more than cancels your gains'. Second-strike nuclear forces serve that kind of strategy. Purely defensive forces provide no deterrence. They offer no means of punishment. The message of a defensive strategy is this: 'Although we cannot strike back, you will find our defences so difficult to overcome that you will dash yourself to pieces against them'. The Maginot Line was to serve that kind of strategy.<sup>115</sup> Is the Arrow defence system the Israeli Maginot Line?

Since for Israel the price of a nuclear missile hit on Tel Aviv, for example, is unbearable, an active defence system, such as the Arrow, can only be relevant against a nuclear missile threat if it provides hermetic protection. However, it is clear that from the technological aspect it is impossible to guarantee hermetic sealing against attacking ballistic missiles.<sup>116</sup> In a matter of fact, the leakage rate of the Arrow (like that of any other missile defence system) will be very high.<sup>117</sup> Consequently the attempt to defend Israel by means of an active defence system against nuclear missiles is liable to transpire to be a grave strategic failure.

After all, it is almost obvious that in a time of trial the policy-makers in Israel will not be prepared to take the chance of nuclear missiles penetrating the defence system and hitting the Israeli home front. In contrast, from the moment that the enemy acquires nuclear missiles it will be necessary to regard every missile launched

against Israel as if it were a nuclear missile. In such circumstances a new Israeli policy of deterrence would be formulated against the nuclear threat when it was realized. As part of this policy no attempts would be made to intercept enemy missiles, but there would be made clear to the enemy the insufferable price that he would have to pay for the attempt to launch a nuclear attack on Israel. Deterrence is the sole way of countering a nuclear threat, as transpired in the past from the experience of the two super-powers. In such a case the Arrow system would of course become totally irrelevant.<sup>118</sup>

Furthermore, the deployment of an active defence system is liable to spoil the Israeli deterrence posture. A significant part of the success of deterrence policy depends on its image in the eyes of the enemy. It will have a greater chance of success the more the opponent believes in the determination of the deterrent party to make use of military means to retaliate for the damage he has sustained. The deployment of the Arrow system against nuclear missiles will signal a negative message to Iran, as far as Israel is concerned. The signal will indicate in fact that Israel is aware of the existence of Iranian nuclear missiles, and is consequently attempting to intercept them. This action could be interpreted by the Iranians as if Israel will wait, in a case of an Iranian missile attack, until the missiles hit the ground in order to find out whether the warhead is nuclear, and only then will decide on retaliation. In other words, this message awards a degree of legitimacy to the Iranians to try and launch their missiles, since Israel is prepared to come to terms with the possibility that missiles will in fact be launched and will make efforts to intercept them. Such a message damages the deterrent image of Israel and the image of the degree of Israel's determination to retaliate against the Iranians if they make any use of nuclear weapons.

#### *Unconcealed Nuclear Deterrence*

This is the most reasonable and effective option that Israel should adopt. Just as the two super-powers reached recognition that only unconcealed and dependable deterrence of each side by the other would prevent any use of nuclear weapons, Israel will be forced to adopt this approach.<sup>119</sup> It seems that the most effective way of deterring the policy-makers in Iran from the future use of nuclear weapons will be to make clear to them the price they will be forced to pay if they launch missiles against Israel.

For this purpose Israel will be forced to abandon the policy of nuclear ambiguity and switch to unconcealed deterrence, in which it will make clear to Iran the new rules of the game. This deterrence must include clear explanations regarding the red lines that, by crossing them, the Iranians risk an Israeli nuclear response. For example, it will be made clear that the detection of any missile launched from Iran in a westerly direction will mean for Israel the launching of an Iranian nuclear missile against it. In such circumstances Israel will not wait to see where the missile hits and whether it is equipped with a nuclear warhead. No attempt will be made to intercept it, but Israeli retaliation will automatically follow.<sup>120</sup>

That will include a nuclear attack on major targets in Iran, such as Tehran, Tabriz, Kom, Ispahan, etc. Such clarification will force the Iranians to decide whether the killing of several hundreds of thousands of Israeli citizens is worth the price of the destruction of the modern Iranian state, its return to the Middle Ages, and the loss

of life of millions of its citizens. It is doubtful if there is any Iranian national interest, including the possibility of wiping out citizens of 'the small Satan', that justifies such a high price.

'What government would risk sudden losses of such proportion or indeed of much lesser proportion?' asks Waltz. 'Rulers want to have a country that they can continue to rule', he argues in what seems to be a valid argument for a future mutual nuclear deterrence between Israel and Iran. 'If countries armed with nuclear weapons go to war, they do so knowing that their suffering may be unlimited. Of course, it also may not be. But that is not the kind of uncertainty that encourages anyone to use force. In a conventional world, one is uncertain about winning or losing. In a nuclear world, one is uncertain about surviving or being annihilated. If force is used and not kept within limits, catastrophe will result.'

That prediction is easy to make because it does not require close estimates of opposing forces. The number of one's cities that can be severely damaged is at least equal to the number of strategic warheads an adversary can deliver. Variations of number mean little within wide ranges. The expected effect of the deterrent achieves an easy clarity because wide margins of error in estimates of probable damage do not matter. Do we expect to lose one city or two, two cities or ten? When these are the pertinent questions, we stop thinking about running risks and start worrying about how to avoid them. In a conventional world, deterrent threats are ineffective because the damage threatened is distant, limited, and problematic. Nuclear weapons make military miscalculations difficult and politically pertinent prediction easy.<sup>121</sup>

Will Iran be deterred? Waltz notes that much of the literature on deterrence emphasizes the problem of achieving the credibility on which deterrence depends and the danger of relying on a deterrent of uncertain credibility. One earlier solution to the problem was found in Thomas Schelling's notion of 'the threat that leaves something to chance'. No state can know for sure that another state will refrain from retaliating even when retaliation would be irrational. No state can bet heavily on another state's rationality. Bernard Brodie put the thought more directly, while avoiding the slippery notion of rationality. Rather than ask what it may be rational or irrational for governments to do, the question he asked, and repeated in various ways over the years, was this: how do governments behave in the presence of awesome dangers? His answer was 'very carefully'.<sup>122</sup>

In regard to the fears that Iran will use its nuclear weapons against Israel without taking the responsibility for this action, we can use Waltz's observation. Although Waltz refers to Arab states, the same principle can be applied in the Iranian case. 'Some have feared that nuclear weapons may be fired anonymously – by radical [Arab] states, for example, to attack an Israeli city so as block a peace settlement. But the state exploding the warhead could not be sure of remaining unidentified.' This is even truer when we analyse the use of nuclear missiles (which are the weapons that Iran can use in order to hit targets in Israel). 'Even if a country's leaders persuade themselves that chances of retaliation are low', argues Walt, 'who would run the risk?'<sup>123</sup>

Furthermore, Israel will also have to present a reliable second strike capability, so as to eliminate Iranian thinking of surprising Israel with a nuclear strike that would neutralize its capability of striking Iran. A second strike capability can be constructed by means of ballistic missiles deployed in hardened silos, which would prevent their destruction even by a nuclear hit in their vicinity, and by means of maintaining a continuity of flights by aircraft equipped with nuclear weapons, and which would not be vulnerable to the enemy's nuclear weapons.

The third possibility, and the most effective, is by means of submarines equipped with nuclear missiles. These cannot be hit by the enemy, and in most cases he cannot even locate them. According to reports in foreign publications Israel has begun the construction of a second strike capability by means of submarines of the Dolphin class, that are being built for it in a German shipyard. Three such submarines have already been acquired by the Israeli Navy, and two additional ones have recently been ordered in Germany.<sup>124</sup>

In December 1990, Major General Avraham Botzer, former commander of Israel's navy, told Israeli television that Israel needed the Dolphin class submarines 'as platforms for weapons systems to deter against an attack by weapons of mass destruction'. Botzer said the submarines 'are a way of guaranteeing that the enemy will not be tempted to strike pre-emptively with non-conventional weapons and get away scot-free'.<sup>125</sup>

Naturally, this step of abandoning nuclear ambiguity and switching to uncoiled nuclear deterrence must be done in coordination with, and with the agreement, of the United States. Israel should therefore initiate a dialogue with Washington, making the first move to reaching a new 'nuclear agreement' with the White House before international bodies make decisions on Israel's nuclear affairs.

It would not be the first time that the two countries are cooperating on the Israeli nuclear policy. As Avner Cohen reveals, almost 40 years ago, the United States adopted the Israeli policy, and accepted the Israeli decision not to join the NPT. On 29 July 1969 the Israeli Ambassador to the US, Itzhak Rabin, was summoned by Acting Secretary of State Elliott Richardson and Deputy Secretary of Defence David Packard. The two officials pressed Rabin on three issues: (1) the meaning of Israel's 'non-introduction' pledge; (2) Israel's signature on the NPT; (3) Israel's intentions on the missile issue. Rabin provided no replies and subsequently proposed to leave the whole issue for the meeting between President Nixon and Prime Minister Meir in late September.

On the eve of Meir's visit the State Department prepared a background paper for the President concluding that 'Israel might very well now have a nuclear bomb' and certainly 'had the technical ability and material resources to produce weapons grade uranium for a number of weapons'. No written record of the meeting between President Nixon and Prime Minister Meir on 26 September is available, but it was a key event in the emergence of the 1969 US–Israeli nuclear understanding. Subsequent documents suggest that Meir pledged to maintain nuclear restraint – no test, no declaration, and no visibility – and after the meeting the Nixon White House decided to 'stand down' on pressure on Israel.

On 7 October 1969 Ambassador Rabin formally provided his belated answers to the US questions: Israel will not become a nuclear power; Israel will decide on the

NPT after its election in November; Israel will not deploy strategic missiles until 1972. On 23 February 1970 Ambassador Rabin informed Kissinger that, in light of President Nixon's conversation with Meir in September 1969, Israel 'has no intention to sign the NPT'.<sup>126</sup>

Another issue that arises in this context is the degree of rationality of the Iranian leaders. The opponents of the switch to unconcealed nuclear deterrence argue that because of the lack of rationality that characterizes the Iranian leadership it is impossible to deter it, and consequently it is uncertain that nuclear deterrence will prevent them from launching nuclear weapons against Israel.

In this regard one can agree with Waltz's observation:

the quality of states' external behavior is commonly inferred from their internal characteristics. Thus many emphasize the importance of *who* the new nuclear states will be and dwell on the question of whether their rulers will be 'rational'. They have failed to notice that radical states usually show caution in their foreign policies and to notice that nuclear weapons further moderate the behavior of such states when vital interests are at issue. Nuclear peace depends not on rulers and those around them being rational but on their aversion to running catastrophic risks.<sup>127</sup>

The perception that sees the Iranian leadership as irrational is based on the idea that Shi'i religious doctrine exalts the suffering and martyrdom of the faithful, and because religion plays a central role in the official ideology of the Islamic Republic, Iran is sometimes portrayed as an 'undeterrable' state driven by the absolute imperatives of religion, rather than by the pragmatic concerns of statecraft.<sup>128</sup>

The perception, however, of Iran as an irrational, undeterrable state with a high pain threshold is both anachronistic and wrong. Within the context of a relatively activist foreign policy, Iranian decision makers have generally sought to minimize risk by shunning direct confrontation and by acting through surrogates (such as the Lebanese Hizballah) or by means of stealth (Iranian small boat and mine operations against shipping in the Gulf during the Iran–Iraq War) in order to preserve deniability and create ambiguity about their intentions.<sup>129</sup>

Historical experience teaches that the Iranian leadership acts in a totally rational manner where the possibility of the payment of a high price for use of military force is concerned. For example, even the Ayatollah Khomeini, no doubt regarded by many as an extremist, an irrational person, acted in a totally rational manner when the Iraqis began launching ballistic missiles against Tehran, taking a toll of thousands of Iranian lives. Khomeini, who had previously declared that he wouldn't sign a cease-fire agreement with Iraq under any circumstances, until Iraq surrendered totally to Iran, was forced to come to terms with the new situation created by missiles falling in the heart of the Iranian capital, and sign a cease-fire agreement with Saddam Hussein.<sup>130</sup>

And if this 'extremist' and 'irrational' leadership acted in this way when the capital was attacked with conventional weapons, it is very reasonable to assume that a threat of attack by nuclear weapons would lead it to avoid using its nuclear weapons in the future.

Another argument, that the opponents of Israeli nuclear deterrence use, is the notion that Iranian leadership will use its nuclear weapons against Israel in order to save their regime. Albert Wohlstetter imagines a situation like this when he refers to Russia. He writes that there is a risk that the Soviet Union might strike first. Her leaders might decide to do so in a desperate effort to save a sinking regime. According to Wohlstetter, some rulers will do anything to save themselves and their regimes. That is the assumption. But, as Waltz comments, how a regime can hope to save itself by making a nuclear strike at a superior adversary, or at any adversary having a second-strike force, is not explained.<sup>131</sup>

It is almost certain that no leader of a country, who controls nuclear weapons, will act in an irrational manner and be prepared to commit suicide together with his country. Furthermore, in the case of Iran, there is no aim that can be achieved by means of a nuclear attack on Israel that would justify the payment of such a heavy price.<sup>132</sup> It is therefore most probably that Israel will adopt the option of unconcealed nuclear deterrence in the event of Iran completing the development and the acquisition of nuclear weapons.

## Conclusion

The key to strategic stability in a nuclear Middle East lies in the realization and acceptance by decision makers in Jerusalem and Tehran that there is no point to using nuclear weapons – if both sides have it. There are many in Israel who claim that, unlike the super-powers' decision makers, the ayatollahs are not rational and therefore one cannot rely on the possibility of deterring them from using the bomb.

From there it is a short distance to promoting the idea of attacking Iran's nuclear facilities. More than a handful of those in the security and political establishment are convinced that if Iran does not agree to halt its nuclear programme, there will be no escape from activating the Israel Defence Forces and attacking its nuclear sites.

The problem is that it is doubtful whether it would be possible to destroy Iran's nuclear plan by Israeli military means. And because it seems that the political pressure and the 'light sanctions' imposed on Iran will not bring an end to the Iranian nuclear programme, it is necessary to be prepared for a situation in which Tehran has nuclear weapons. If those who doubt that it is possible to deter the Iranian leadership are correct, Israel will indeed find itself in existential danger.

However, it is more reasonable to assume that if the ayatollahs control nuclear weapons, they will arrive at a 'rational' conclusion. That is what happened in the case of India and Pakistan, which joined the nuclear club in 1998, much later than many other nations. Since then, the leaders of both countries – whose prolonged dispute has already led to three wars – have behaved extremely cautiously with regard to any use of military power. This was tested during the 'Kargil Crisis' in 1999.<sup>133</sup> It is reasonable to assume that, at the moment of nuclear truth, Iran's considerations will be identical. The price that nuclear weapons could exact from the Iranians is in an unimaginable scope, and it can be assumed that no Iranian leader would be prepared to pay it simply in order to kill 'Zionist infidels'.

In view of the above, all of the declarations concerning the development of the operational capacity of Israel Air Force planes to attack the Iranian nuclear site and missile launchers, and the unfounded promises that the Arrow can effectively handle the threat of the Shahab-3, not only contribute nothing to the strengthening of Israel's deterrent capability; they actually undermine the process of consolidating that deterrent capability and providing it with credibility in Iranian eyes.

Other options which were analysed in the article, including passive defence, retention of the existing policy (ambiguity), reliance on the protection of an American nuclear umbrella, and negotiations with Iran regarding disarmament and inspection arrangements, were found to be with negligible chances of realization.

At the end of the current process, and if there will be no decisive action against the Iranian nuclear programme, Iran will probably equip itself with nuclear weapons. In this case the chances are that a Middle Eastern model of MAD (mutual assured destruction) will be developed in the region. In a speech he delivered at Hiroshima 26 years ago, Pope John Paul II said, referring to the deep shadow cast on the world by the nuclear menace, that from now on the human race could survive only through a conscious choice and level-headed policies. Today, more than 60 years after Hiroshima, it is worth reiterating these words also for the sake of the Middle Eastern leaders who, in the not-too-distant future, will be forced to make tough decisions in the nuclear sphere.

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