THE FUTURE OF THE US-ISRAEL SECURITY PARTNERSHIP

Client: Center for a New American Security

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Capstone Report

May 15, 2015

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Executive Summary

The US-Israel security partnership has been a cornerstone of US foreign policy in the Middle East for decades, and leaders of both nations continue to reaffirm their “special relationship.” Today, three key foreign policy issues are challenging this cooperation: the situation in the West Bank and Gaza, Iranian nuclear development, and regional upheaval in the wake of the Arab uprisings. A close analysis of American and Israeli perspectives reveals converging and diverging interests and threat perceptions with respect to these issues.

Even a brief backward glance into history shows that frictions are not new to the relationship. Discussion of selected historical antecedents highlights patterns of tensions and guidelines for dealing with them, providing perspective on long-term trends in security cooperation between Israel and the United States.

While both Israel and the US have nominally supported a two-state solution as the best way to resolve the Palestinian issue, there is growing divergence in their policies. Unilateral actions by both Israel and the Palestinian Authority that jeopardize prospects for a final resolution raise serious questions about the best direction for US policy. The US should avoid exercising leverage over Israel and Palestine to try to push the parties towards negotiations or impose fundamental policy changes. Instead, the US should align its policies more closely with its interests and expectations: emphatically opposing continued Israeli settlement expansion; clearly defining end goals for security cooperation and training of Palestinian security services; announcing parameters to serve as a framework for future talks whenever the parties are ready to come back to the table; and helping the parties deliver on their practical commitments to change the situation on the ground.

The US and Israel strongly agree that the possibility of Iran’s acquiring nuclear capabilities is a threat, but disagree over the exact nature of the threat and how to best manage it. The successful conclusion – or breakdown – of nuclear talks with Iran in the next few months will likely force American and Israeli policies to either align or come to a head, with potentially fundamental consequences for their relationship. In order to promote the best possible outcome, the US should pursue its targeted policies while simultaneously reassuring Israel through a formal guarantee of protection. Communication lines with
Israel should be strengthened so as to demonstrate the US's continued attention to Israel's views while also emphasizing that an Israeli kinetic strike against Iran is unacceptable at this time.

American and Israeli responses to regional turmoil since the 2011 Arab uprisings have generated opposing trends. On the one hand, there is a high degree of convergence of interests and threat perceptions with regard to the proliferation of militant organizations and required counterterrorism responses. The US supports Israel's right to defend its sovereignty and security, and both agree on the pivotal role of Egypt as a strategic regional ally. Nonetheless, there is an ongoing divergence between the US and Israel concerning the promotion of democracy in the Middle East. While the US has been vocal – albeit belatedly and inconsistently – about its democratic hopes for the region in the wake of the uprisings, Israel has been more concerned with the potential security consequences of political instability.

With respect to each issue, there is no monolithic “American” or “Israeli” perspective. Instead, debates persist within each country on how to address threats in order protect vital interests, and these different approaches create friction in the relationship. In seeking to overcome these challenges, it is necessary to identify areas where cooperation around common interests can be improved, while also acknowledging that the US must at times disagree with Israel in view of differing strategic priorities. The resilience of the relationship will be tested by its ability to adapt to divergences in interests and threat perceptions without causing a significant rift. Whether or not the US and Israel wisely coordinate their policies on these three significant issues will determine the future course of the US-Israel security partnership.
Introduction

This report analyzes current major challenges to the US-Israel security partnership. Frictions between the partners have surfaced in three distinct issue areas: i) the status of the West Bank and Gaza as part of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict; ii) Iranian nuclear development and implications of a possible agreement between Iran and the United States; and iii) regional instability in the Middle East in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings of 2011. We frame agreements and disagreements on each issue with perspectives drawn from historical antecedent case studies. Our findings are assessed through a comparative analysis, highlighting the relative salience of these issues. We conclude by suggesting how current and future disagreements between the US and Israel may be addressed.

As we proceed, it is imperative to understand how the world and the countries of the Middle East view the relationship between the US and Israel. For example, in 2001, Iraqi dissident Nabeel Musawi argued that “bias by the United States” in favor of Israel explained why the US has become the target of militant Islam. In a 2012 opinion poll conducted in 12 Arab countries, the US and Israel were ranked as a more intimidating danger than Iran. Accordingly, it is legitimate to ask whether the US necessarily pays a price for its alignment with Israel in terms of its broader interests in the Middle East.

US-Israel Relations 1967-1974

Historically, the United States and Israel have shared a bilateral partnership spanning over six decades. The relationship of the two states involves the sharing of information, economic aid, military assistance, and cooperation in joint military exercises. However, this relationship has not always been close. For most of the first two decades after Israeli independence, the United States was not Israel’s closest ally or main provider of military and economic aid. It was after emerging victorious in 1967 that Israel gained the robust backing of President Lyndon Johnson as a pro-Western, democratic, and relatively powerful nation. President Johnson, began to supply Israel with the advanced F-4 Phantom aircraft, significantly improving Israel’s military capabilities. Diplomatically, this sale signaled to Israel enhanced US support and commitment to its security. Additionally, in a

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region where American interests were threatened by the spread of Communism and Pan-Arabism, Israel came to be seen as a valuable strategic ally.

Although President Nixon was mainly preoccupied with South-East Asia, the surprise war launched by Egypt and Syria in October 1973 obliged the Administration to display its support for Israel. Israeli military setbacks at the outset of the war led some defense officials to press Prime Minister Golda Meir to prepare to use Israel’s nuclear capabilities.\(^4\) While this option was probably raised primarily to gain American attention rather than to actually engage in such an extreme response, American assistance came in an operation code-named Operation Nickel Grass. The US strategically airlifted weapons and supplies to Israel and for the first time in their bilateral relationship. The rest of the world was affected when Arab members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries initiated a partial oil embargo in retaliation.

**US-Israel Relations 1974-1989**

Changes in the US-Israeli relationship emerged under the leadership of US President Gerald Ford. His rapport with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin became tense when Ford called for a reassessment of America’s Middle East policy after the failure of several attempts at diplomacy between Egypt and Israel. Whereas the declared objective of the “reassessment” was to develop a new diplomatic approach, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was openly critical of Israel’s refusal to compromise.\(^5\)

President Jimmy Carter was much more actively involved in Middle Eastern affairs than previous American leaders. However, he held very different views concerning the Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian territories than Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin of the Likud Party. Nevertheless, Carter and his team successfully brokered the 1978 Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel, resulting in the historic signing of the first peace treaty between an Arab state and Israel in 1979. Even so, disagreements between Israel and the US continued concerning the Palestinian right to establish a homeland.

Strategic coordination between the US and Israel was enhanced under the leadership of President Ronald Reagan. In 1981, the Strategic Cooperation Agreement was concluded, with the primary objective of deterring Soviet threats in the Middle East; it provided for

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military exercises and joint readiness activities between the US and Israel. In 1983, the Joint Political Military Group was initiated as a high-level planning forum that meets biannually to discuss and implement combined planning and joint military exercises and logistics. Two years later, the US and Israel established the Joint Economic Development Group (JEDG), to enhance bilateral economic ties. Additionally, relations between the US and Israel were upgraded when in 1989 Israel was granted the status of MNNA (Major Non-NATO Ally), giving it access to many privileges and benefits.

On the other hand, regional diplomatic efforts were stalled during the Reagan years. One notable initiative was the announcement of the Reagan Plan in September 1982, which proposed the establishment of a Jordanian-West Bank confederation. This framework for Palestinian self-determination would have entailed an Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories in exchange for Arab recognition of Israel. Unfortunately, the plan was never formalized because Israel asserted that the possibility of a Palestinian state posed a security threat, and Arab leaders were unwilling to enter into negotiations with the Israelis.

Another sign of friction in the US-Israel relationship was the turbulent showdown over Israeli airstrikes that targeted the Iraqi nuclear facilities in Osirak in 1981. In response to Israel’s unilateral use of force without consulting its American partner, the US suspended the transfer of military equipment to Israel and harshly criticized the Israeli operation. Additionally, Washington policymakers considered Israel’s use of force excessive during its military campaign in the 1982 Lebanon War. The US was further displeased after it was revealed that an American intelligence analyst, Jonathan Pollard, had been selling classified US information to Israel. These discordant episodes disrupted what many analysts otherwise considered to be the most constructive interval in US-Israel relations to date.

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US-Israel Relations 1989-Present

During the Presidency of George H. W. Bush, the first real steps towards a peace agreement between the Israelis and the Palestinians were taken at the 1991 Madrid Conference. Facilitating circumstances resulted from American success during the Gulf War in creating a coalition of Arab and non-Arab forces, and in pushing back the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. During the Gulf War, Iraqi missiles had been fired at Israel: however, the US persuaded Israel not to respond by increasing its military aid and cooperation through anti-missile defense programs. After the war, the ability of the Administration to convene the Madrid Peace Conference laid the foundation for the Oslo Accords a few years later. However, the US and Israel continued to disagree on the issue of Palestinian statehood and Israeli expansion of settlements. But when the Labor Party in Israel won the 1992 election and placed a partial freeze on housing settlements, Americans were encouraged.

President Bill Clinton took a deep interest in the Middle East peace process, working with four different Israeli Prime Ministers (Rabin, Peres, Netanyahu, and Barak) to seek peace accords between Israel and several Arab counterparts—Palestinians, Jordanians and Syrians. The Oslo Peace Accord of September 1993 between Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Chairman Yasser Arafat was signed on the White House lawn, and Clinton successfully mediated several successive Palestinian agreements and the peace agreement between Israel and Jordan in 1994. However, US-mediated negotiations in 2000 with Syria on the status of the Golan Heights and with the Palestinian Authority on the permanent status of the West Bank and Gaza did not yield agreement.

A shift in American security priorities under the leadership of President George W. Bush, emphasizing counterterrorism, brought greater harmony to the US-Israel relationship. After the events of 9/11 and Bush’s proclamation of the War on Terror, the United States and Israel appeared to share more common interests in fighting militant Islamist threats. One result was continued US support and military aid to Israel during the 2006 Lebanon War.

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Currently though, under President Barack Obama’s administration, the relationship with Israel has come under pressure, raising serious questions as to whether the United States and Israel share the same interests and threat perceptions regarding developments in the Middle East. President Obama has consistently stated that the US-Israel relationship will continue unabated concerning the sharing of information, economic aid, military assistance, and cooperation in joint military exercises. The tension between the current administration and the Israeli government is due to “knotty policy differences” over three major issues: the status of the West Bank and Gaza, Iranian nuclear development, and regional instability in the wake of the Arab uprisings of 2011.

**Palestinian Issue**

The peace process launched with the Oslo Accords of 1993 and 1995 has since been marred by a series of failed talks and recurring rounds of violence. Most recently, a negotiating initiative led by US Secretary of State John Kerry collapsed in April 2014 before it could achieve a meaningful breakthrough. Tensions escalated into a war in Gaza, culminating in Israeli Operation Protective Edge, a ground offensive from July to August 2014. After a UN Security Council draft resolution in support of Palestinian independence was defeated in December 2014, Palestinian Authority President Abbas decided to sign over twenty international treaties. This included a move to officially join the International Criminal Court on April 1, 2015 with the stated intention of bringing a case against Israel for war crimes. Israel retaliated by withholding tax revenue that it collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, causing it substantial financial strain.

Israel only announced that it would release this revenue after the reelection of Prime Minister Netanyahu, who called into question his commitment to a two-state solution during his campaign. Although quickly walking back this rhetoric after his resounding victory, the Obama administration continued to issue strong criticism and indicated that it was considering reevaluating its approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The tension in the relationship is prompting internal debates in both Israel and the US about the policies to adopt regarding the West Bank and Gaza. With the conflict unlikely to be resolved in the

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17 “Palestinians formally join International Criminal Court.” BBC News. 1 April 2015.
18 “Remarks by President Obama”
near future, these tensions will continue to be a source of friction in the US-Israeli relationship.

**Iranian Nuclear Development**

While the Obama Administration has worked hard to reach a nuclear agreement with Iran, both the Republican Party and the current Israeli leadership have made clear their rejection of any such deal, regarding it as detrimental to regional security and stability. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and his domestic opposition agree that Iran’s possession of nuclear capabilities would pose an existential security threat. However, the opposition is concerned that Netanyahu’s adamant posture may jeopardize the broader security partnership with the United States. Much depends on the US’s ability to balance the pursuit of its policy goals with sufficient reassurance of Israel, alleviating the latter’s security concerns sufficiently so that it will not act obstructively. Whether or not a comprehensive agreement between Iran and the Obama Administration is reached, it is clear that the Iranian nuclear issue will remain an international and regional threat for many years to come.

**The Arab Uprisings**

US foreign policy in the Middle East region flows from often contradictory impulses regarding the pursuit of counterterrorism and concern for democracy promotion and human rights. Previously, in pursuit of regional security and stability, the United States backed Sunni authoritarian regimes that failed to meet the demands of their growing populations. In 2011, popular uprisings brought down authoritarian rulers in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. Several of these societies in transition, which the US had perceived as experiments in democracy and change in the Middle East, are now viewed as hotbeds of chaos and anti-American sentiment. As unrest throughout the region has continued, the US has been alarmed by an unprecedented escalation of violence and the emergence of extremist groups. As the Obama administration pushes to eradicate the extremist threat growing out of Syria and Iraq, it also seeks to maintain strong ties with key Arab partners such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia. These efforts are complicated as the US continues to raise human rights concerns with the current Egyptian government led by President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, while simultaneously pursuing negotiations with Iran, Saudi Arabia’s natural regional rival.
The recent turmoil in the region has also given Israel reason to worry. The ongoing civil war in Syria, where Iran and Hezbollah are actively participating, could threaten to spill over Israel’s Golan Heights border, and ongoing terrorist activity in the Sinai Peninsula poses a serious security threat to Israel. However, the removal of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt was a positive development for Israel in neighboring Egypt, where President Sisi has reassured Israel that the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty will remain intact. Nevertheless, continuous turmoil in the region remains a major concern for Israel, which has remained largely silent on political developments in neighboring states. The strong incentives for the US and Israel to align their responses to security threats emerging from the region will be affected by their diverging perspectives on the viability of democracy promotion.

Analysis

As developments in these three issue areas continue, the United States and Israel’s partnership will come under further scrutiny and tests. In order to assess and make recommendations for the future of the security relationship, we have developed a specific methodology for analyzing convergences and divergences in US and Israeli interests and threat perceptions.

REFERENCES


Methodology

In order to evaluate the current status and potential future trends in the US-Israel security partnership, we are suggesting a systematic methodology by which to assess how threats relevant to each issue—the West Bank and Gaza, Iranian nuclear development, and the Arab insurrections—are perceived by these two nations. Subsequently, we identify how
these threat perceptions diverge or converge. In the following analysis, we break down our methodology into several key components.

**Historical Antecedents as Comparative Case Studies**

First, we look closely at historical antecedents from which to draw lessons about current conditions and trends for each issue. To inform our analysis, each issue team has selected one comparative case study which highlights the stances, interests, and responses that the US and Israel adopted during critical junctures related to the topics in question. This allows us to identify patterns in behavior and sources of friction that remain relevant today.

**National Security Decision-making**

Next, in order to better understand Israeli and US decision-making on security issues, we consider how each defines vital interests and threats to those interests. Our understanding of security encompasses not only traditional military concerns, but also more broadly defined security interests such as those tied to peace processes and democracy promotion. We examine the role of debates among domestic constituencies in defining these interests and threats and advocating particular responses.

Here we implement our particular methodology to differentiate threats in terms of type, time frame, and level of likelihood. We distinguish three types of security threat: physical, political, and demographic. We borrow these terms from Kobi Michael as relevant categories; their definitions have only been slightly modified for our purposes. We classify whether each challenge poses an imminent, short-term, or long-term threat to the nation in question. Finally, we assign each threat a level—low, medium, or high, or existential—to help us compare divergences and convergences in perception across cases. Definitions are as follows:

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Asymmetry, Leverage, and Prioritization

Finally, we consider the role that asymmetries, leverage, and prioritization play in the relationship. Asymmetries in terms of size, power and geographical proximity to threats are key to understanding divergences in threat perception. Undeniably, the US enjoys asymmetric advantages in size and power, as well as the luxury of being distant geographically from the Middle East. As a result, the US can decide to leverage these advantages in framing the relationship with Israel, accentuating the latter’s junior role in the patron-client relationship. On the other hand, Israel’s record of gaining reliable support from the US creates expectations more commonly associated with a relationship between independent, equal partners.

Lastly, prioritization strongly affects the willingness of the US to exert leverage and Israel’s readiness to respond to it. For example, when an issue is of high priority to Israel but relatively low priority for the US, the US may not be inclined to exercise its potential leverage. Conversely, the likelihood that the US and Israel will clash over any of the three

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**Threat Classification**

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<tr>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Threat Type</th>
<th>Threat Level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Imminent</strong></td>
<td>Demographic - Relates to a loss of the national majority in</td>
<td>Low - Attack/threat</td>
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<td></td>
<td>the state in question. For Israel, this means the Jewish</td>
<td>is not expected to</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>majority specifically, perhaps characterized as national</td>
<td>occur.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>identity.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Short-Term</strong></td>
<td>Political - Relates to the loss of international legitimacy/</td>
<td>Medium - Attack/threat could occur.</td>
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<td>credibility for the decision-making elite (leadership) in</td>
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<td></td>
<td>question and/or the right of that state to exist. Threats</td>
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<td>to a political-level concept of sovereignty.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Long-Term</strong></td>
<td>Physical - Relates to military security and includes a wide</td>
<td>High - Attack/threat is likely to occur.</td>
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<td>spectrum of conventional and non-conventional threats,</td>
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<td>ranging from Iranian nuclear bombs to local terrorism. This</td>
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issue areas increases if their interests diverge and both attribute high priority to policy outcomes. This disparity can be especially salient for threats that Israel considers “existential”, defined as “a trend, process, or development that substantially endangers the existence of the state of Israel as the national homeland of the Jewish people.”

**Drawing Conclusions**

The final goal of our report is to use our findings to identify which strategies might bridge or aggravate disparities in threat perceptions, and draw implications for the ‘special relationship’ that has historically existed between the US and Israel. We end with recommendations for managing the US-Israeli relationship in a way that best protects US interests.

**REFERENCES**

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20 Michael, p. 689.


**Status of the West Bank and Gaza**
**Introduction**

Since 2014, failed negotiations, accompanied by a war in Gaza, a defeated draft resolution to the United Nations Security Council, and Palestine joining the International Criminal Court have increased tensions between Palestine and Israel, and strained the relationship between Israel and the United States. The areas of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem remain turbulent. While the Palestinian Authority (PA) began exhibiting nominal self-rule in the West Bank in 1995, the Israeli military has occupied and administered the territory since the end of the Arab-Israeli war in 1967. Approximately 500,000 Israeli settlers continue to occupy portions of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. In Gaza, although Jewish settlers were evacuated and the IDF was withdrawn in 2005, Israel maintains control of the borders and the flow of commerce.

The US continues to ensure that Israel maintains robust military capabilities. Currently, Israel receives $3 billion in military aid from the US, as well as additional appropriations for rocket and missile defense programs. The US also provides Israel with guaranteed loans, although stipulations prevent these funds from supporting activities in the West Bank and Gaza. In addition, many pro-Israel US organizations support Israeli efforts, including settlement activity, through tax-deductible donations to various Israeli organizations.

The Israeli-Palestinian peace process is at both an impasse and a crossroads, creating an opportunity for the US and Israel to reconsider their policy options. To gain historical perspective on the US-Israel relationship, we examine Operation Defensive Shield (2002) and the 2003 Road Map. We then outline Israeli and US interests and threat perceptions with regards to the West Bank and Gaza to frame the policy discussion. Finally, analysis of various policymakers’ and experts’ views on how the US should address the issues of settlements, future negotiations, security cooperation, and unilateral action – and the likely Israeli reaction to those decisions – inform discussion of future options shaping the security partnership.

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22 “A Dangerous Place to Visit.” The Economist, 10 April 2012.
**Historical Antecedent: 2002 Operation Defensive Shield and the 2003 Road Map**

Comparing Operation Defensive Shield and the Road Map to decisions and outcomes during the Obama era illustrates trends in the US-Israel relationship over time. Comparative insights may illuminate the implications of US actions or inactions on progress in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process then and now.

**Denial of US Requests to End Israeli Military Action**

In March 2002, the Israel Defense Forces responded to the Second Palestinian Intifada by forcibly entering cities on the West Bank. The IDF had previously turned over control of those cities to the Palestinian Authority pursuant to the diplomatic framework of the Oslo Accords.

During Operation Defensive Shield, President George W. Bush demanded that Israel stop military actions in Palestinian territories and withdraw troops; Israel did not comply. Similarly, President Obama’s request to Prime Minister Netanyahu for Israel to cease military actions in Palestinian territories during Operation Protective Edge in Gaza in 2014 was denied. In each case, Israel’s unilateral use of force and reluctance to curb its military campaign created tension with an American administration.

At the same time, while voicing concerns about Israeli military operations, American administrations have consistently supported Israel’s right to self-defense. In speaking about Operation Defensive Shield, Bush said “frankly, it’s not helpful what the Israelis have recently done in order to create conditions for peace.” But he also stated that “Israel will make the decisions necessary to defend herself.” Obama also firmly declared that Israel was justified in defending itself, but expressed concern about civilian casualties and potential escalation.

**Windows of Opportunity for the US to Act as Mediator**

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26 Keinon.
After an IDF strike on Palestinian President Yasser Arafat’s compound, the US intervened and assumed the role of mediator. Typically since then, in response to intermittent clashes between Israelis and Palestinians, the US has been inclined to launch new diplomatic initiatives, either unilaterally or multilaterally.

If violent clashes open a window for negotiation, this strategy may be effective. However, negotiations are only meaningful if both parties comply with the terms of the agreement. In the wake of Defensive Shield, the US joined with other members of the Quartet (the European Union, Russia and the United Nations) to broker the Road Map, a peace plan envisioning three phases to finalize the status of the West Bank and Gaza. During the first phase, Israel was required to freeze the construction of Jewish settlements, and the Palestinian Authority was required to initiate security sector reform and stop attacks on Israel. However, even the first phase of the agreement was never implemented. This suggests that violent conflict may not always provide an appropriate window of opportunity for successful negotiations.

The Chicken and the Egg Syndrome

Both during the Bush era and today, the US has urged Israel to halt construction of Jewish settlements in the territories occupied during the June 1967 war. For Bush, the withdrawal of Israeli settlements was included in the first phase of the Road Map, in exchange for Palestinians engaging in security reform. However, as it was then and is now, both Israelis and Palestinians desire to see action on behalf of the other party before fulfilling terms of the agreement, resulting in inaction on both sides. When Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s cabinet approved the Road Map, it attached 14 reservations, including an insistence that “incitement cease immediately” and calm be achieved and maintained in order for the process to start.” Mahmoud Abbas, then Prime Minister, rejected the reservations as part of the Road Map and expressed their unacceptability to Palestinians.

30“Israel’s Road Map Reservations.” Haaretz, 27 May 2003.
32“Israel’s Road Map Reservations.” Haaretz, 27 May 2003.
33 Alon, Gideon, Nadav Shragai, and Arnon Regular. “Sharon, Abbas to Meet as Cabinet Approves Road Map.” Haaretz 26 May 2003.
The Road Map also highlighted tensions between the parties over a phased process. Israel insisted on this phasing, and the stated reservations stressed the necessity for Palestinian obligations in each phase to be fully completed before proceeding to the next. Palestinians were wary of the tendency for phasing to get stuck in the early stages, therefore preventing Palestine from ever benefitting from the concessions meant to be made by Israel. Therefore, Abbas emphasized that “close and effective supervision” will be the “real test” for implementing the map. Through the Road Map, the US accommodated Israel’s preference for phasing, but it did not succeed in preventing the process from stalling. This tension over phasing continues to cause friction in the peace process today.

The US Role in Security Cooperation

The Road Map calls for the streamlining and professional training of Palestinian security forces, as well as a resumed security cooperation with the IDF. Leading this initiative, the US created the position of US Security Coordinator to oversee training of Palestinian police, resulting in enhanced professionalization of the Palestinian security forces. US-backed security cooperation continues to be a cornerstone of the peace process and maintaining stability in the West Bank.

Impact of Regional Issues on US Actions in Israel and Palestine

During the Bush era, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan brought together the EU, the Russian Federation, and the US to formulate the Road Map. For Bush, the proposal came at a critical time for the US in its attempt to create an international coalition to support the use of force against Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq: US actions in Israel had the potential to impact other issues of high interest to the US in the region. Similarly, Obama is attempting to build an international coalition to support a nuclear agreement with Iran, while balancing negotiations between Israel and Palestine. The relevance of citing these parallels (even if not fully substantiated) is to call attention to the way in which US administrations may consider implications of US policy in one issue area for outcomes in another sphere.

34 “Israel’s Road Map Reservations.” Haaretz, 27 May 2003.
35 Alon, Gideon, Nadav Shragai, and Arnon Regular. “Sharon, Abbas to Meet as Cabinet Approves Road Map.” Haaretz 26 May 2003.
The Israeli Perspective

Palestine was designated by the League of Nations in 1922 as a mandate to be administered by Britain until it was ready for independence. In 1947, the United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 181, authorizing the partition of British Palestine into an Arab state and a Jewish state. For the Jewish community, the Partition Resolution marked the legal basis for the establishment of Israel, despite rejection of partition by local Palestinians and the Arab League. Approximately 750,000 Palestinian refugees were displaced by the end of the 1948 war, and the subsequent Six Day War of 1967 resulted in Israel gaining control of 78 percent of the original territory of Palestine. Settlements, refugees, the status of Jerusalem, security concerns the establishment of Palestine as a sovereign entity remain topics of intense dispute. Underlying these issues are a wide set of interests held by Israel and the United States, shaping the threat perceptions and policy decisions of each.

Israel’s Interests

Israel has clear interests in maintaining a strong relationship with the United States.\(^{38}\) However, Israel also manifests an interest in retaining control over Arabs in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza.\(^{39}\) These interests conflict at times.\(^{40}\) In explaining their attitudes toward US diplomatic initiatives calling for withdrawal from territories captured in 1967, Israelis do not possess a unified perspective on Israel’s vital interests.\(^{41}\) Understanding the reasons for this diversity is critical to understanding Israeli threat perceptions. Notwithstanding nuances, perspectives on Israel’s interests can be broken down into three general buckets: advocates of a two-state solution, security-driven Zionists, and maximalist Zionists.\(^{42}\)

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42 Zionism is the movement for the return of Jewish people to Israel, and the establishment of Israel as a sovereign Jewish state.
Advocates of a Two-State Solution

Adherents to this view believe in equality between Jews and Arabs in Israel, and embrace collective rights and the full integration of Palestinians into Israeli society, including granting them full political rights. However, they also support the maintenance of Israel as a Jewish state. Consequently, supporters of this view believe Israel should be willing to make “painful concessions” to help create a viable Palestinian state. Practically speaking this means Arabs and Jews split into separate jurisdictions, each maintaining governing capacities over its own people. From this perspective, Israel’s vital interests include guaranteeing the security of a portion of the land, and ensuring that Israel maintains its Jewish identity within the boundaries belonging to Israel. This view is associated with the Israeli “left.”

Security-Driven Zionists

For proponents of this view, Jews should remain the demographic majority in Israel, and Arab citizens should be guaranteed civil and political rights. Supporters of this view embrace a two-state solution, but not at the expense of Israel’s security. Thus, concessions to accommodate Palestinian demands are limited. Regarding the West Bank, they believe that the IDF should remain only if Israel’s security is enhanced by its presence, and that settlement blocs should remain only where they can be protected at an acceptable cost. This view is associated with the Israeli “center.”

Maximalist Zionists

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43 Interview with Shlomo Brom, Senior Research Associate, Institute for National Security Studies, 27 March 2015.
48 The Israeli left captured 23 percent of the votes in the 2015 election of the Prime Minister, falling behind the right, which received 37 percent of the vote. See Beauchamp, Zachary, and Katy Lee. 2015. “Here’s the Breakdown on Israel’s Election Results - It’s Looking Great for Netanyahu.” Vox, March 18.
50 The Israeli center received just over 17 percent of the votes in the recent Prime Minister elections, falling behind the right with 37 percent, and the left with 23 percent. See Beauchamp, Zachary, and Katy Lee. 2015. “Here’s the Breakdown on Israel’s Election Results - It’s Looking Great for Netanyahu.” Vox, March 18.
In this view, the sovereignty and security of Israel, including authority in the West Bank and Jerusalem, is necessary for its realization as a Jewish state. Consequently they believe Jews should maintain exclusive control over the state, and perceive Arabs as a potential security threat that should be contained as much as possible under Israeli control. Because of this perceived threat, some maximalist Zionists envision future expulsion of Arabs from Israel. They consider Israel’s vital interests to include preserving the identity of Israel as Jewish state by maintaining rights and recognition for Israeli Jews anywhere within British Palestine, perpetuating the status quo in encouraging growth of Jewish settlements, and for some, annexing the West Bank. For adherents of this view, the Palestinian Authority is useful so long as Israel is absolved of civilian responsibilities toward the Palestinian population, while Israel maintains military dominance and control of critical natural resources. This view is associated with the Israeli “right.” Although a majority of Israeli Jews loosely identify with the political right, only a minority among them espouse its most extreme positions.

**Israeli Threat Perceptions**

Delineating Israeli perspectives is helpful for exploring threat perceptions. Threat perceptions can be thought of as two distinct types. The first is physical security threats, threatening the actual existence of the State of Israel and its people. The second type is more abstract, less tangible demographic and political threats that undermine a concept, such as an identity or way of life. The severity of threats to Israel changes depending on how Israel’s fundamental interests are defined. The following will outline three ways of perceiving the threats facing Israel in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with reference to the interest categories defined in the previous sections.

**Existential Threats to Israel in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict**

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54 This is evidenced by recent pre-election public opinion polls that showed that 34 percent of Israeli Jews believed Netanyahu was best suited to serve as Prime Minister, followed by Herzog (18 percent) and Naftali Bennett (10.5 percent), and that Likud and Bayit Yehudi, both right wing leaders, are preferred by 45 percent of Israeli Jews. See Yaar, Ephraim, and Tamar Hermann. 2014. *Peace Index December 2014.* Public Opinion Poll. Peace Index. Israel: Tel Aviv University.
55 For purposes of this paper, the term ‘existential threat’ will be defined via Kobi Michael’s definition: “a trend, process or development that substantially engenders the existence of the state of Israel as the national
In the early years of Israel’s statehood, Arab states posed an existential security threat to Israel. Hostile Arab states formed military alliances to wage war, which Israelis believed were intended to eliminate Israel as a Jewish state. A partial realization of this scenario was experienced on the eve of the Six Day War. At the time, Israel lacked defensible borders and faced serious asymmetries with its enemies with regards to size, military capabilities, equipment and economic power. While this experience remains ingrained in the minds of many Israelis today, since then both the Middle East and Israel have changed significantly. Israel now possesses a strong military, economy, and technological base. Asymmetries with Arab neighbors have essentially reversed, and none of Israel’s neighbors is currently a candidate to wage interstate war against it. Thus the existential security threat facing Israel has diminished significantly. However, the weakening of neighboring states has coincided with the increased salience of non-state actors.

With regards to the Gaza and West Bank, there are four types of physical security threats that concern Israel today:

- Non-sanctioned terrorist threats - non-state actors
- Sanctioned terrorist threats - hostile Palestinian government supporting terrorist threats
- Non-Palestinian external threats - non-state groups that infiltrate Palestinian territory
- Non-Palestinian sanctioned threats - foreign state using Palestinian territory

Of these, non-sanctioned terrorist threats comprise the biggest threat to Israel’s physical security, especially in the West Bank where Hamas and the Islamic Jihad have many sympathizers. In Gaza, threats include the Hamas-led government, the Islamic Jihad, Salafi-type groups, and groups in the Sinai.

Weapons moving across the borders of the West Bank and Gaza from countries like Iran comprise another physical security threat. The smuggling of dual-use weapons, or those made from materials that can also be used for legitimate purposes was a concern in Gaza,
and could become a concern in the West Bank. However the degree to which this becomes an existential security threat depends on the development of the broader regional picture.

**Threats to Physical Security and to Israel’s Jewish Identity**

Maximalist Zionists, or the Israeli right, are most committed to the perception that Israel today faces imminent, high, physical security threats originating from both state and non-state actors in Palestinian territories, and that Palestinians pose long-term, high, demographic threats to Israel as a Jewish state. Maintaining territorial security, and non-recognition of Palestinian national and political rights are critical components of the Maximalist security strategy.\(^{56}\) From this perspective, a two-state solution that recognizes Palestine as truly sovereign would mean a loss of control and power for Israel, thus is not supported by the Maximalist view.

The Maximalists’ solution to these threats is to reclaim and secure Palestinian territories under the guise of national security. Thus, the threat of militant Islamist groups and violent actions originating on Arab soil are responded to with swift and severe acts of military force, which have resulted often in high Arab casualties. Settlements are also used to combat the Palestinian demographic threat, as substantial new construction in the West Bank enables expansion of existing Jewish communities.\(^{57}\) The proliferation of settlements that strategically fracture the contiguity of Arab communities in Palestinian-controlled territories, and settlements located on top of critical resources such as aquifers in Palestinian controlled territories are evidence of Maximalists’ strategy. Ultimately, only the rejection of a two-state solution and annexation of these territories would relieve physical and demographic security threats, and achieve security for the maximalist Zionist Jewish state.

**Deterring the Demographic Threat through Military Assurances**

Unlike the Maximalists, Security-Driven Zionists support a two-state solution that provides Arab citizens’ rights only in so far as it does not compromise the Jewish majority in Israel. This view perceives the demographic threat as long-term, of medium level of concern, and contingent on the continued physical security of Israel and its Palestinian neighbors. As long as the physical security of Israel is maintained either by stable and reliable Palestinian


security services, or with assistance from the IDF, it perceives the physical security threats to Israel as imminent but of a low level of concern. Thus Security-Driven Zionists are most concerned with ensuring that either the Palestinian Authority is able to maintain a capable police and intelligence presence in Palestinian territories, or that interpretations of existing agreements, such as the Oslo Accords, enable Israel to maintain military control of Palestinian territories.

The position of the Security-Driven Zionists has been affirmed by the lack of response by the Palestinian Authority during episodes of violent conflict. For instance, when Israel engaged in military operations against the Hamas-led authorities in Gaza, the lack of response by the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority was a source of embarrassment. Events such as these have created a fundamental lack of trust between Palestinians and Israelis that impedes broad support of a political solution. Israelis, who do not trust Palestinians to protect against physical security threats, step in to ensure this security is achieved.\textsuperscript{58} No matter how desirable it is to Israelis to reach a political agreement, most are not willing to commit until they are confident that there is a credible Palestinian government with capable security services that can reliably prevent the West Bank from becoming a breeding ground for terrorists. Unless this condition is fulfilled, Security-Driven Zionists view the departure of the IDF from occupied Palestinian territories as a serious threat to Israel’s security.\textsuperscript{59}

\textit{The Political Threat of Failing to Arrive at a Two-State Solution}

For Proponents of a Two-State Solution, demographic and physical security threats are long-term and low. On the other hand, there is a short-term, medium, political threat associated with a failure to recognize the rights of Palestinians. From this perspective, physical security threats, such as terrorism are a nuisance to Israel, but such threats do not rise to the level of an existential level.\textsuperscript{60} Proponents point out that prior to the development of long-range technical defensive capabilities, maintaining borders was critical. However,

\textsuperscript{58} Sixty percent of Jewish Israelis think that in its own security interests, Israel should not unilaterally withdraw from the majority of the West Bank. See \textit{The Peace Index: May 2014}. 2014. Public Opinion Poll. The Peace Index. The Israel Democracy Institute.

\textsuperscript{59} For instance, a public opinion poll showed that in July of 2014, 95 percent of Jewish Israelis thought Operation Protective Edge was justified, and only 3 to 4 percent thought the IDF overused firepower in the operation. See \textit{The Peace Index: July 2014}. 2014. Public Opinion Poll. The Peace Index. The Israel Democracy Institute.

\textsuperscript{60} Interview with Brom.
technological advances have enabled longer-range missiles to strike from farther away, and at the same time enabled vastly improved systems of early warning and early detection countermeasures to defend against them. Thus, if missiles can be launched into Israeli territory by Iran, or Hezbollah from Lebanon, control of land and immediate borders becomes less critical to maintaining security. To illustrate they point to the fact that currently there are almost no Israeli forces present in the Jordan Valley, nor are they needed because of the existence of a credible partner on the other side. This example highlights that while Jordan could pose a potential physical security threat, political solutions, such as the current treaty, are more effective than the use of military force for establishing security. Thus, Proponents view diplomacy, negotiation and partnerships as the best pathways to achieving security.

Proponents of a Two-State Solution also oppose the idea that establishment of a sovereign Palestine will threaten Israel as a Jewish state. Instead, they support a two-state solution that prioritizes Palestinians’ human security, or the creation of the conditions that enable Palestinians to achieve self-supported state security and establish a sovereign state. They view the development of physical and economic infrastructure as the building blocks for Palestinians to achieve the kind of order, and develop the physical security forces necessary to maintain a stable government of their own. In fact, failure to achieve recognition of Palestinian rights could threaten the international credibility of Israel, and potentially harm its strategic alliances. Thus, the best solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is to grant Palestinians sovereignty and equal rights, and support their evolution into a credible partner whose compliance is cemented in the form of agreements and guarantees.

The US Perspective

US Interests

61 Ibid.
64 Interview with Brom.
US interests in the West Bank and Gaza are framed in terms of its diplomatic relations and reputation in the region. The US feels a moral affinity with and obligation to defend Israel as the only well-established democracy in the Middle East. As an ally, the US seeks to ensure that an Israeli withdrawal from the Palestinian territories will not cause Israeli insecurity, but strongly believes that Israel will be more secure with a two-state negotiated solution with Palestine. By promoting the peace process, the US also seeks to reconcile traditional support for Israel with diplomatic ties with Arab states, and protect its reputation as a supporter of rights and decolonization.

US Threat Perceptions

The US is indeed viewed in the region through the prism of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and is criticized when it doesn’t speak up for Palestinian rights. As long as the Palestinian issue goes unresolved, US credibility in the region and relationships with Arab states suffer. This threat could be described as political and imminent, according to the methodology of this study. In the wake of failed negotiations, several rounds of war in Gaza, and unilateral actions by both Palestine and Israel, the likelihood of this threat can be classified as medium. Furthermore, the Palestinian issue is an emotive one in the Islamic world and the region, and it is often exploited for recruitment by terrorists and jihadists that attack US troops and allies. This therefore constitutes a physical and imminent threat, with a high likelihood of occurrence – particularly as part of the wider trend of increased extremist violence currently plaguing the region.

The US is also worried that the Palestinian Authority may eventually collapse, wasting billions in US investments and jeopardizing the viability of a two-state solution. On its own, this is a short-term political threat for the US with a currently low risk of actually happening. However, the possibility that such a collapse could cause a power struggle between Hamas and Fatah, open up an ungoverned space, and potentially spread instability

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67 Interview with David Makovsky, Ziegler Distinguished Fellow, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 26 March 2015.
68 Interview with Senior Official, US government, not for attribution, 27 March 2015.
69 Interview with Makovsky.
70 Interview with Senior Official.
71 Interview with Khaled Elgindy, Fellow, Brookings Institution, 27 March 2015; interview with Bushong.
72 Interview with Senior Official.
73 Interview with Natan Sachs, Fellow, Brookings Institution, 27 March 2015.
to neighboring Jordan,⁷⁴ which is itself a close US ally, adds a potentially physical threat dimension. At a more imminent threat level is the prospect that PA President Abbas could decide to implement the Palestine Liberation Organization’s decision on 5 March 2015 to suspend all security cooperation with Israel, which would lead to a serious crisis and perhaps further violence.⁷⁵ This would be a political threat for the US, and though the threat level might still be characterized as low due to the grave consequences it would entail for both Palestine and Israel, the likelihood could quickly rise to medium due to actions on both sides.

**US Policy Options**

Compared to the US, Israel has more vital interests in and perceives more direct threats from the West Bank and Gaza. Nevertheless, the US has long invested substantial time and resources towards addressing the situation in Palestine. Perspectives on US continued engagement in the conflict tend to fall into three general approaches, for which we suggest the following labels—critical, proactive, and minimalist. These are differentiated by their degree of criticism towards Israel and the extent to which they believe the US can influence the two parties to reach an agreement in the peace process. These three categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive; nor do the views of individual analysts necessarily fall neatly into one of these categories. Instead, it is best to imagine a spectrum along which individual views and policy options may be aligned.

**The Critical Approach**

This perspective is the most critical towards Israel and of the US-Israeli relationship, believing the US *could* but *will not* do more to influence Israeli policy. The relationship is perceived as lacking strategic benefit and harming US interests by skewing its priorities.⁷⁶ Overall, this view calls for the most fundamental changes in the US’ approach to addressing the situation in the West Bank and Gaza.⁷⁷

**Political Support for Palestine**

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⁷⁴ Interview with Senior Official.
⁷⁶ Interview with Bushong.
⁷⁷ Khaled Elgindy, of the Brookings Institution, and Vice Admiral Paul Bushong, former US Security Coordinator for Israel and the PA, fall on this side of the spectrum.
Critics believe the US should increase its political support for Palestine. The US could do more, in coordination with Arab states, to help the Palestinian Authority (PA) shore up its divided and dysfunctional leadership to help it become a stronger player. It could refrain from actively opposing Palestine’s recourse to the International Criminal Court (ICC), which is seen as a legitimate step toward boosting Palestine’s credibility as a state. The US could also stop vetoing United Nations Security Council resolutions on Israel’s behalf. The US could even consider formulas under which it would be willing to recognize Palestine as a state. Moreover, the US could support Palestine indirectly by being more critical of Israel during wars with Gaza and holding Israel accountable for civilian casualties. This perspective views political reunification between Hamas and Fatah as a necessary precondition for a meaningful and sustainable peace agreement, arguing that the US should be supportive of Palestinian unity.

**Security Cooperation**

Beyond political support, the US could modify its approach to continued security cooperation and training of the PA security forces in the West Bank. This training has already greatly improved their effectiveness, and a degree of professional respect now exists between them and the IDF. However, there is no established policy defining the goals of this engagement, and the US Security Coordinator is specifically directed not to make policy in the field. Due to this lack of strategic guidance, Israel has an effective veto over virtually every aspect of the program. With a better-defined policy and stated outcome objectives, the US could do more to use security cooperation as a platform on which to build on mutual security interests. The US would have to decide what end result it wants to see and how much it is willing to invest to make that happen - including by adopting policies more independently from Israeli leadership.

**Settlements**

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78 Interview with Elgindy.
79 Interview with Bushong.
80 Interview with Elgindy.
81 Interview with Ilan Goldenberg, Senior Fellow, Center for a New American Security, 8 April 2015.
82 Interview with Bushong.
83 Interview with Makovsky.
84 Interview with Bushong.
85 Interview with Bushong.
86 Interview with Bushong.
The Critics also call for the US to use active and passive leverage to persuade Israel to change its settlement policy. With clearly stated criteria for defining settlements, the US could actively tighten restrictions on tax-exempt organizations that fund them and encourage certain private divestments to create an economically discouraging environment. The US could choose not to impede European measures such as settlement product labeling and sanctions. Some Critics even suggest that the US could use its Foreign Military Financing (FMF) as leverage to prompt a policy change. Such measures would seek to ensure that Israeli settlement activity does not undermine the possibility for a negotiated two-state solution.

The Peace Process

Critics generally believe that if the US was willing to use “tough love” with Israel to spur concessions and be “bold enough in seeking to bridge the differences”, it could succeed in brokering a resolution. However, most think the US is unlikely to ever address the huge power imbalance between the two sides by exerting this kind of leverage on Israel. While Critics still recognize that the US will need to continue playing an important role, they see a US-dominated process as outdated and ineffective. Instead, the lack of American even-handedness has exacerbated the weakness of the PA and eroded Palestinian confidence. Therefore, in future negotiations the international community, particularly European and Arab states, will need to play a larger role, including in creating the necessary architecture and mechanisms to generate an environment conducive to success. Since Palestinians see past interim agreements such as Oslo as a “repackaged occupation,” future negotiations based on this revised model should seek a comprehensive agreement with strong international guarantees.

87 Interview with Elgindy.
88 Interview with Elgindy.
89 Interview with Bushong.
(Note: Nathan Thrall was here referring to what he calls “Reproachers”; while there are similarities such as the one referenced here, his description of this group is not the same as that of the “Critics” outlined in this paper.
91 Interview with Elgindy.
92 Interview with Elgindy.
94 Interview with Elgindy.
95 Interview with Elgindy.
Implications

Of the three perspectives, the policies recommended by the Critics would mark the most fundamental shift in the US-Israeli relationship, entailing a significant increase in friction. However, on a political level not only would most of these options incite a strong negative reaction from the large majority of Israelis (excluding, perhaps, those who feel most firmly that Israel should change its policy towards Palestinians and Arab-Israelis), they would also likely face significant domestic pushback from a still pro-Israeli Congress and the influential Israel lobby. They are least likely to lead to the resumption of a diplomatic process, and other than security cooperation, many of these policies would not necessarily lead to concrete changes on the ground. That said, a greater willingness to criticize Israel for actions and policies that directly contradict American principles would more closely align American policy with those of the majority of the international community and could raise American credibility abroad.

The Proactive Approach

Proactivists are not as critical of Israel or the current dynamics of the US-Israeli relationship. They believe the US can and should take an active approach towards the conflict, arguing that by combining determination and smart diplomacy, the US can positively influence the choices of the two parties and lead them to peace.96

Capacity-building and Gaza Wars

Advocates of this perspective stress the necessity of shoring up the wherewithal of the PA, as do the Critics. However, Proactivists focus on capacity-building rather than political support. The US is the largest financial contributor to the PA: it has invested billions97 to help it develop a stand-alone economy, practices of good governance and law and order, and professionalized security forces.98 This investment has paid off, and the judicial sector is seen by many in the US government as the last major area in need of further improvement before Palestine could be considered ready for statehood.99 Rather than considering this support as

96 Former ambassador Dennis Ross, now at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, and David Makovsky, of the same institution, can both be generally described as Proactivists. 97 Thrall. 98 Interview with Senior Official. 99 Interview with Senior Official.
a way to counter Israeli dominance, the Proactivists note that reinforcing the PA also benefits Israel: 100 it eases international pressure, decreases Israeli vulnerability, and reduces the likelihood that Israel could end up with governing or security responsibilities in the West Bank. Furthermore, building the PA’s capacity is critical for establishing it as a strong moderate alternative to Hamas. 101 Unless Hamas fundamentally changes its behavior – perceived as unlikely to impossible – Proactivists are against greater engagement with them, either through a Palestinian unity government or in the peace process. 102

Proactivists tend to assign greatest responsibility for recurring wars between Israel and Gaza on Hamas. For example, in a 2005 talk in Gaza City, Dennis Ross warned the Palestinian Legislative Council (along with several senior members of Hamas who were in attendance) that if they responded with violence to Israel’s unilateral withdrawal from Gaza, they would have only themselves to blame when Israel refused to also withdraw from the West Bank. 103 Proactivists support Israel’s right to self-defense, and recommend that while operations such as those conducted in recent years in Gaza are underway, the US should reassure Israel of support and refrain from excessive criticism, so that it ends its operations more quickly. 104

Settlements

Proactivists recommend that the US strongly encourage Israel clarify its settlement policy to lend credibility to Netanyahu’s professed commitment to a two-state solution. 105 This policy must delineate where settlement expansion is allowed and prohibited, rather than calling for zero settlement growth. One suggestion is that Netanyahu announce - and then adhere to - a policy making the 92% of the West Bank beyond the security barrier strictly off limits for settlement expansion. 106 This would take the majority of the land off the table, with the status of the rest to be determined by future negotiated land swaps. 107 Any additional settlement activity compromising the territorial contiguity of a future Palestinian state or

100 Interview with Makovsky.
102 Myths, illusions, and peace, pg. 266-267.
103 “Hamas could have chosen peace.”
104 Interview with Goldenberg, 8 April 2015.
105 “Hamas could have chosen peace.”
106 Interview with Makovsky.
107 Interview with Makovsky.
the possibility of East Jerusalem as its capital, would have to be halted. Implementing a reasonable, specific, and understandable geographical delineation might temper the international de-legitimization of Israel.

**UN Security Council Parameters Resolution**

Some Proactivists have proposed that the US support (or at least abstain from) a new United Nations Security Council parameters resolution which would form the basis for future negotiations. This resolution could: 1) focus only on settlements; 2) attempt to address all of the main issues of the conflict, particularly by bridging the gap on issues of identity by guaranteeing East Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital in exchange for foregoing the right of return; or 3) address most issues but defer security until later. Some Proactivists stress that an effective Security Council resolution would require important concessions from both Israelis and Palestinians. A resolution biased in favor of Palestine would be counterproductive, and the fact that the existence of a Security Council resolution would create the potential for future sanctions increases the risk that it might be perceived as a tool of disproportionate leverage over Israel.

**The Peace Process**

In contrast to the Critics, the Proactivists see the US as a critical actor in the peace process. Despite the breakdown in official talks in 2014, the US could still urge and assist both sides in following through on commitments they have already made and attempt to broker smaller, more informal agreements or unilateral steps to build confidence. For example, the Israel Defense Forces should refrain from night incursions into the West Bank, and the Palestinian leadership should continue efforts to curb public incitement. Rather
than singling out Israel, this conflict management approach aims to “coax” both sides into taking small steps towards final-status talks when the time is right.\textsuperscript{119}

This incremental approach is reflected in the Proactivists’ conflict resolution strategy. They argue that attempting to hit a “home run” in negotiations increases the chance of failure. Instead, the US should adopt the principle of doing whatever can be formally agreed upon rather than waiting to agree on all points before starting implementation.\textsuperscript{120} The Proactivists have confidence in the US’s ability to help Israel and Palestine reach an agreement on all the issues, saying that although the US has historically strong ties to Israel, it understands and is actually closer to the Palestinian position with regard to a final status agreement.\textsuperscript{121} However, to do this, the US must give Israel “unwavering...support”, “embracing Israel tightly, reassuring it, and alleviating its fears.”\textsuperscript{122}

In light of this approach, the Proactivists see Palestine’s move to join the ICC (where its membership became official on April 1) as damaging to the peace process. Not only does this move risk politicizing the ICC, but it could “unfairly criminalize” the relationship between the two parties while perpetuating a counterproductive narrative of “villain and victim.”\textsuperscript{123}

**Implications**

Advocates of this approach believe the US should nudge, and sometimes prod, Israel and Palestine towards a negotiated solution. While the role of the US remains prominent, increased multilateralism is also potentially useful, as in using the forum provided by the UN to make progress towards peace. While a resolution focused exclusively on settlements would still generate pushback from Israel,\textsuperscript{124} it is not as likely to cause a firestorm between the US and Israel as more ambitious parameters resolution.\textsuperscript{125} In any case, it is unlikely that US would choose this course of action, which would probably be rejected by Israelis, and

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{119} “Open a Middle Road to Mideast Peace.”
\textsuperscript{120} Interview with Makovsky.
\textsuperscript{121} Interview with Makovsky.
\textsuperscript{122} Thrall.
\textsuperscript{124} Interview with Senior Official.
\textsuperscript{125} Interview with Makovsky.
\end{flushleft}
perhaps also by Palestinians, as an imposed solution. However, the Obama administration has hinted that it might consider such an initiative nonetheless.\textsuperscript{126}

In sum, the Proactivists actively seek opportunities for direct engagement: their approach is the most likely to lead to renewed negotiations, but not necessarily successful ones. The greatest strength of this approach is its emphasis on facilitating concrete and incremental change on the ground, above and beyond the promotion of peace talks.

**The Minimalist Approach**

Proponents of this perspective do not see harsh criticism of Israel as a constructive or sufficient way of getting them to conclude an agreement and are skeptical about the US's ability to influence Israeli or Palestinian policy on major issues. Rather, some (well-timed) criticism can influence Israeli or Palestinian actions in a moderate way and could be useful in clarifying the American position on issues. Instead of trying to actively solve problems in the conflict, the US should limit its actions to what is necessary to protect its core interests, and wait for both parties to come to it before taking on a more invested role. However, when the timing is right and the parties are committed, the Minimalists believe the US will play a crucial part in achieving a final resolution.\textsuperscript{127} \textsuperscript{128}

**Settlements**

Minimalists believe that while public criticism of Israeli settlements may modestly influence the timing and scope of some settlement activity, the pursuit of a freeze has proven unsuccessful and not worth the political capital, with adverse consequences to US diplomatic posture and efforts.\textsuperscript{129} And while a UN resolution on settlements could help reinforce the US position and place some pressures on Israel, Minimalists highly doubt it would fundamentally impact Israeli settlement activity, particularly because the US would never


\textsuperscript{127} The views of former State Department officials Aaron David Miller, now at the Wilson Center, and Alon Sachar, a member of the negotiations team under Special Envoy Mitchell, align closely with the Minimalist perspective.

\textsuperscript{128} Another, small subgroup along the spectrum, not discussed here, are those that Nathan Thrall calls the “Skeptics”: they are highly supportive of Israel and hold Arabs responsible for not making peace. Like Minimalists, they do not think the US can or should try to influence the policies of the two parties on major issues. They go further to say that official peace negotiations are pointless and even dangerous for causing violence to flare up. They prefer to focus on “bottom-up” approaches with mutual incremental steps. See Thrall article “Israel & the US: The Delusions of Our Diplomacy.”

\textsuperscript{129} Interview with Alon Sachar, former Official, US Government, 27 March 2015.
allow one-sided UN sanctions on Israel. Minimalists do not see the point in piling criticism on Israel without the intention of imposing real costs. In theory, the US could do this by leveraging Foreign Military Financing, but there is neither the incentive nor political will to consider such a policy. Minimalists perceive the net effect of these kinds of external initiatives as ultimately detrimental to prospects for an eventual Israeli-Palestinian peace. However, the US can facilitate efforts to address the situation on the ground without trying to impose radical policy changes on either party.

**Politics and Wars**

Minimalists also see efforts to influence the political positions of either Israel or Palestine as futile and counterproductive. In their view, political support of Palestine at the ICC and in the Security Council would only infuriate Israel and prompt the Palestinians to hold out for more. The prospects are slim for passing a UN parameters resolution that balances Palestinian and Israeli interests (favoring Palestinians by espousing 1967 lines with swaps and Jerusalem as a capital for two states; and favoring Israel by promoting security, a solution to the refugee problem largely outside of Israel, and designating Israel as a homeland for the Jewish people). Such a resolution would confirm Israeli suspicion of UN bias in favor of Palestine without changing facts on the ground; causing an unnecessary and unwinnable fight with an ally entailing high domestic political costs. Minimalists take no normative position on political reunification between Fatah and Hamas, but measure the potential impact of such a move by its ability to gain acceptance by both the US and Israel, which for now remains unlikely.

When tensions in the conflict are escalating towards violence, Minimalists believe the US can have an important role in urging restraint and trying to work with regional partners to prevent the outbreak of war. Once a war begins, the US should “get involved in the region to urge calm, work with Israel and international organizations to increase aid (housing, medical, food) to Palestinians”. However, the US should not jump in to engage

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130 Interview with Sachar.
131 Interview with Aaron David Miller, Distinguished Scholar, Wilson Center, 6 April 2015.
132 Interview with Sachar.
133 Interview with Aaron David Miller.
134 Interview with Sachar.
135 Interview with Aaron David Miller.
137 Interview with Sachar.
138 Interview with Sachar.
with Hamas and Israel in the hopes of pushing them to sign an immediate ceasefire. This would both strengthen Hamas’s position while further undermining Abbas’s (and the Palestinian Authority’s) credibility, and is unlikely to be effective. Instead, the US can play a key role when both sides are ready to make a deal and approach the US as a mediator. Minimalists therefore see the role of the US in mediating Gaza wars as “transactional, not transformational.” In the meantime, while the US might feel that Israeli military actions are unwise and should condemn any egregious actions, it can still respect Israel’s right to self-defense and the fact that the Israel Defense Forces have made reasonable efforts to reduce civilian casualties.

The Peace Process

Minimalists argue that the US should wait to be approached by the two parties before resuming significant diplomatic engagement. They believe past initiatives have often failed because the parties were only at the table at the US’s request, and these failures have resulted in a damaging loss of American credibility. Meaningful negotiations require a real willingness on both sides to make tough decisions together, and a smart, tough and effective US mediator; in their view, this combination has not been present since the 1991 Madrid Conference. In the interim, attributing blame is a pointless exercise.

The US should, however, lay out its own proposed parameters and expectations for negotiations. As opposed to a resolution at the UN, a US statement would be a suggestion for – not an imposition on – the parties. While the parameters would not aim to change the political position of the parties in the short term, they would provide an Israeli (or Palestinian) leader a politically expedient way to accept a principle they could not propose themselves as a basis for further negotiations. Furthermore, while some backlash is still

140 “Five Myths about the Gaza Crisis.”
142 Interview with Sachar.
143 Interview with Miller.
144 Interview with Miller.
145 Interview with Miller.
146 Interview with Sachar.
147 Interview with Sachar.
likely from both sides, this approach might allow some of the inevitable anger to be dispelled now rather than during future negotiations.\textsuperscript{148}

When the timing is right, Minimalists believe that the US is still the only actor who can broker an agreement by “delivering” Israel. Not only is the US the only mediator that Israel trusts, but it alone possesses the resources and military capabilities necessary to help the Israelis have the means to defend themselves, as well as to provide guarantees that help alleviate Israeli security concerns.\textsuperscript{149} Therefore, the strong US-Israeli bilateral relationship is a key part of the US’s ability to play a strong role in the negotiations. According to this argument, what is important is not for the US to be unbiased, but for it to be effective and accepted as broker by both sides.\textsuperscript{150}

Minimalists believe that future negotiations must be comprehensive from the outset. Not only do confidence-building measures in interim processes take a long time to negotiate and therefore take time away from discussion of the core issues, but they also have the counterproductive tendency of falling apart and creating more grievances.\textsuperscript{151} Due to the highly interrelated nature of the core issues, technocrats are unlikely to be able to effectively negotiate, let alone implement, details of an agreement absent reaching political consensus on principles for all of them.\textsuperscript{152}

\textit{Implications}

The Minimalists believe that the realities of diplomatic power in a globalized world mean the US cannot make Israel or Palestinians do what it wants, and should act (or sometimes refrain from acting) accordingly. They advocate an approach in which the US helps frame and manage the issues on the macro level but is primarily responsive on the micro level. The strength this perspective brings to the debate is having the wisdom to know that it does not matter how much the US wants a negotiated outcome if that drive is not matched on the part of both parties. However, this approach risks becoming too hands-off, tiptoeing around Israeli and Palestinian political sensibilities. It is true that the strength of the bilateral relationship is likely to be a critical factor in reaching a final solution; however, because of the resilience of the relationship the US should be able to make stronger criticism

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{148} Interview with Sachar.
\item \textsuperscript{149} Interview with Sachar.
\item \textsuperscript{150} Interview with Senior Official.
\item \textsuperscript{151} Interview with Senior Official.
\item \textsuperscript{152} Interview with Sachar.
\end{itemize}
of actions and policies that go against US principles. Issuing a presidential statement of proposed parameters is a good example of reconciling the need to wait for an optimal diplomatic moment while clearly stating the US position.

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

While the varying Israeli and American perspectives regarding the situation in Palestine inform the debate, the view of the primary decision-makers naturally carry the most weight. The Israeli government under Netanyahu and the American government under Obama have converging interests and threat perceptions on several points. Neither is open to engagement with Hamas and both oppose the Palestinian move to join the ICC.\textsuperscript{153} Despite the personal tension between them, both agree that the US remains the only capable and acceptable mediator in the peace process. Both recognize the benefit of US-facilitated security cooperation and training of Palestinian security services, and both are concerned with preventing civilian and security responsibilities from falling back onto Israel through a suspension of Palestinian cooperation or the collapse of the Palestinian Authority. However, Israel has shown a greater willingness to play with fire in this regard, through decisions such as withholding tax revenue and continuing settlement expansion.

There are also areas of divergence between American and Israeli policies, though some are more explicit than others. Although the US has consistently supported Israel’s right to defend itself from rocket fire and other attacks, it does not always fully approve of Israeli comportment during military operations in the West Bank or – more commonly – Gaza. During Operation Protective Edge, President Obama expressed “[deep concerns] about the risks of further escalation and the loss of more innocent life”.\textsuperscript{154} This subtle, but clearly underlying tension was exacerbated by Israel’s choice to bomb hospitals and schools being used by Hamas, causing accusations by UN officials that Israel was violating international law and raising the heat on the U.S for continuing to publically support Israel.\textsuperscript{155}

The most open divergence of policy and constant source of friction revolves around settlements. Israel has persisted in settlement expansion despite consistent US

condemnation. These tensions boiled to their highest point yet when the Obama administration rejected Netanyahu’s efforts to walk back statements made the day before Israeli elections that many interpreted as rejecting a future withdrawal of settlements and a two-state solution. Obama was sufficiently antagonized by these statements to say that he is “required to evaluate honestly how we manage Israeli-Palestinian relations over the next several years,” and the administration has hinted at growing willingness to consider supporting a Security Council resolution. Even in the absence of a concrete shift in policy, the willingness to use such language is indicative of significant divergence in the US and Israeli approaches to Palestine today.

These tensions do negatively affect the ability of these leaders to achieve progress in the peace process. However, they do not necessarily indicate that the security relationship will soon falter. The mutual benefit derived from military and intelligence cooperation provides an incentive to maintain this aspect of the relationship even in the face of policy disagreements. Even as he made the strong remarks above, Obama insisted that the security relationship would continue “unabated”. As long as this relative insulation of the security relationship from the political arena continues, the US has a greater degree of freedom in choosing policy options regarding Palestine without lessening its commitment to Israel’s defense. We recommend the following policies:

1. The US Security Coordinator and State Department should better define policies regarding what the US wants to accomplish through the security training of PA security forces; this would help build confidence between the PA and Israel by addressing security concerns collaboratively, reducing the current asymmetry of control. Creating more independent policies in this area would allow the US to reassert itself with regard to Israel in a concrete but not overly provocative way.

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158 Interview with Senior Official.
159 Interview with Miller.
160 “Remarks by President Obama”.
161 Critic Paul Bushong believes that although the US should be more willing to criticize Israeli policy and act with more political independence, it should also keep firmly reiterating continued support for Israel and commitment to its defense. Bushong interview
2. The US should continue to strongly condemn Israeli settlement expansion as illegitimate. The US should also tighten domestic restrictions so that US-based organizations using donations to directly fund settlements will lose their tax-exempt status. The goal would be to create greater coherence between the US' stated position and domestic policy, not to force Israel to change its policy, which is beyond US control.

3. The US should refrain from pushing Israelis and Palestinians into negotiations until a clear policy window opens. Instead, the US should outline new parameters for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process that may serve as a basis for talks when Israelis and Palestinians are prepared for and committed to negotiations.

4. Until then, where the Palestinians and Israelis are willing, the US should facilitate both sides in following through on commitments they have already made, including previously mentioned measures such as ending IDF night incursions into the West Bank and curbing Palestinian public incitement to violence. These actions are currently the only viable mechanism for changing the narrative of the conflict and storing up the political capital needed on both sides to gain public support for a future peace initiative.

These recommendations balance political realities with the need for the US to play a constructive role in managing and ultimately resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The unsettled situation in Palestine has fundamental implications for Israel’s physical security and national identity. Policies regarding this issue therefore remain of top priority for Israeli policymakers and public. Although the US would very much like to see a resolution to the conflict - with all the benefits it would hopefully entail for its ally Israel, the Palestinians, the region, and itself - the degree of direct impact the conflict has on US interests and security is relatively limited compared to other key issues in the region, such as preventing Iran from obtaining nuclear capabilities and addressing regional instability in the wake of the Arab uprisings. Therefore, despite tensions in the relationship over diverging approaches to the Palestinian issue, the US is unlikely to invest substantial political capital in diplomatic activism contrary to the wishes of the Israeli leadership. On the other hand, given the high priority of the Iranian issue for both the US and Israel, the potential for a significant policy clash is much greater.
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Iranian Nuclear Development

Introduction

One need only look at recent headlines to know that the issue of Iranian nuclear development is at the forefront of both the United States’ and Israel’s security and diplomacy agendas. In fact, this issue is by no means new to decision makers and has
played a critical role in shaping the regional policies for both nations. The US and Israel who have—largely—shared the same goal of preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons across the region. However, the current round of nuclear negotiations between the P5+1 and Iran has given rise to highly public differences between the United States and Israel over how Iranian nuclear development should be approached.

For context, Iran’s nuclear development began in the 1950s under the guidance of Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. The Eisenhower administration supported Iran’s initiative through the Atoms for Peace Program, which sought to promote peaceful uses of atomic energy as part of the United States’ broader Cold War strategy.162 When Ayatollah Khomeini came to power in February 1979, the program was halted and the cooperation between the United States and Iran on this issue ceased as tensions heightened due to the hostage crisis. Iran restarted its nuclear program in earnest, secretly, in 1984 during the Iran-Iraq war partly in response to Saddam Hussein’s pursuit of a national nuclear capability in Iraq.163

Immediately following the first Gulf War of 1991, President Clinton, who was eager to divert regional attention to Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, initiated a “dual-containment” strategy.164 Under dual-containment of Iraq and Iran, the latter was subject to a multitude of sanctions with the goal of limiting the import of conventional missile and dual-use goods and technologies that could assist in the pursuit of nuclear weaponization.165 By contrast, the Obama administration, since its election in 2009, has made public and private efforts to soften tensions with Iran, moving away from continued containment—despite the ongoing expansion of multilateral, targeted sanctions.166 Current nuclear negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 are slated to conclude at the end of June 2015, having cleared their first deadline for a basic political framework on April 2. With a highly partisan split between Democrats and Republicans in Congress over the issue, in addition to the goals of the administration, views of the public, and divisions within Israel—it is

164 Sick, Gary. Interview 2015
166 Sick, Gary. Interview 2015.
hardly surprising that the Iranian nuclear question has already had a huge impact on the future of the US-Israel security relationship.

To gain a better understanding of how these two nations can approach their divergent and convergent views on this issue, we will analyze the outcome of the Israeli-US interaction in the 1991 Scud attacks on Israeli territory during the Gulf War. We will discuss the timeline of Iranian nuclear developments as it relates to US and Israeli policy in more detail, before looking more closely at the United States’ and Israel’s perceptions of threat. Using both academic, practitioner, and expert sources; we will then formulate potential options that may be pursued that could work to shape the future of the Israeli-US security partnership.

**Historical Antecedent: 1991 Scud Attacks on Israel**

The diplomatic and military relationship between the United States and Israel during the first Gulf War serves as a useful point of reference for ways in which the United States has managed differences in interests and threat perceptions with Israel with regards to Iran in the past. This instance highlights an uncommon moment in history in which the United States was able to restrain a right-leaning government within Israel, under the leadership of Likud. It has several parallels to the current situation with Iran’s nuclear ambitions. First, at the time of the war, Iraq had been seeking to increase regional prestige, as Iran is today. Second, the United States had broad regional interests in terms of managing their relationship with a host of Arab nations, Iran, Israel, and other interested parties. Third, the physical safety and security of Israel was perceived to be in danger by Israeli leadership as well as the United States (and indeed was in the case of Scud attacks in 1991). Finally Iraq—like Iran—had a history of threatening public rhetoric against Israel.

However, just as important is to consider the differences. Iraq is geographically closer to Israel than Iran. Iraq used conventional weapons against Israel, though there was fear of a chemical attack. In the case of Iran, the perceived threat is purely non-conventional—namely direct nuclear strike or emboldened proxy groups—with little to no concern of a conventional attack on Israeli territory from Iran proper. Iran and Israel, as rational actors,

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both understand that the geopolitical calculus behind using non-conventional weapons is perceived differently by the international community—namely the United States—than the use of conventional weapons, and therefore also understand that international war is both risky and costly for all involved.\textsuperscript{169} Consequences would no doubt be extremely grave in the event that a nuclear weapon were deployed in the Middle East—let alone anywhere else. Saddam Hussein knew that an invasion by the United States and its Arab partners was imminent, and sought to break apart the Arab side of the military alliance by inducing Israel to become involved in the conflict—first through threats, and then with destructive action. Iran, on the other hand, faces no such imminent pressure and therefore would not have any perceptible incentive to provoke Israel in the same manner.

The United States at the time was familiar with Israel’s unofficial strategic doctrine, which emphasized self-reliance, speed, and preemptive action against perceived imminent threats.\textsuperscript{170} We say that it is unofficial because there is no complete formal statement on record on this issue by the Israeli government. However, based on the kinetic action, articles, books, and force posturing of the IDF and other components of the Israeli security apparatus; views on an Israeli doctrine were—and are—thought to be generally well understood.\textsuperscript{171} This was particularly poignant when considering Israel’s already simmering relations with Iraq, whose nuclear facility at Osirak they had bombed in 1981. Before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the strategic cooperation between the United States and Israel had been reasonably institutionalized under President Reagan as a result of the signing of two agreements, including the designation of major non-NATO ally (MNNA) during his second term. Israel’s trust in the security support of the United States was therefore relatively high.\textsuperscript{172}

By the time the Gulf War was under way, the United States had drawn together a large coalition consisting of US forces and traditional western allies, as well as support from the Gulf States, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Syria. Due to the ongoing tensions between Arab states and Israel, the United States felt that it would be best for Israel to remain completely removed from the fight—even if an attack on Israeli territory were to take place—lest the coalition come apart and the conflict escalate or widen. In addition, Israeli involvement would

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have likely hindered the United States’ ability to operate militarily, as well as erode its
diplomatic and political authority with Arab partners in the region. It is important to note
that prior to Scud attacks against Israel in 1991, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir promised
President Bush that Israel would not take preemptive action—but otherwise kept Israeli
plans concerning Iraq vague and noncommittal. By contrast, Prime Minister Benjamin
Netanyahu has made no such pledge (as far as the public is concerned) regarding Iran’s
nuclear program. The knowledge of regional hostility towards Israel and Israel’s own history
of decisive retaliation has helped inform US predictions of how Israel will react in such
situations—and thus contributes the way that the US seeks to address divergences and
convergences in reactions to shared security interests.

The outcome of this episode serves as the most useful tool for our comparison, and
highlights the United States’ “carrot-and-stick” method of working with Israel. In 1991, Israel
ultimately cooperated with the wishes of the United States and stayed out of the fight despite
Scud attacks from Iraq, perhaps acknowledging that its own interests were best served by
not allowing Saddam to draw them into the conflict and thus threaten the coalition. The
United States agreed to address the Scud issue on Israel’s behalf by deploying Patriot anti-
missile batteries before hostilities broke out and hunting aggressors after the Scud attacks
began; while the US simultaneously reaffirmed commitment to the protection of Israel by
sending high-level delegations to underscore their partnership. However, physical
protection and diplomatic reassurances were coupled with less supportive measures as well.

To raise the stakes for Israel in the event that they chose to act unilaterally against Iraq, the
United States withheld critical operational intelligence and refused to provide the IDF with
the “friend or foe” aircraft identification codes (IFF) that would help them distinguish
between coalition and Iraqi fighters. The key goal then was to “…gain an Israeli commitment
to consult with Washington before taking any military action.” It is important to note that
the success of these agreements was due in some part to the nature of the personal
relationship between President Bush, Prime Minister Shamir, and key members of both
governments. With each new Scud attack, the US sought to reassess and reassure Israel’s

Foreign Relations, June 1, 1999. From Middle East Review of International Affairs.
174 Congressional Research Services (CRS) Translation. “Scud Missiles Against Israel”. Unclassified, Article,
January 29, 1991. Item No. IG01621
175 Lasenksy, Scott B. “Friendly Restraint: US-Israel Relations During the Gulf War Crisis of 1990”. Council on
Foreign Relations, June 1, 1999. From Middle East Review of International Affairs.
commitment to staying out of the fight through robust and open communication on the personal level, as it was widely acknowledged that their decision could be reversed at any moment.

We can summarize the United States’ strategy for reaching a deal with Israel as synchronously utilizing reassurances, incentives, and information denial. This tactic seems particularly favored when Israel deliberately chooses to adopt an ambiguous posture about what they intend to do, as they did in 1991 and may be viewed as doing now—especially before the initial framework was concluded in April 2015. In 1991, reassurances included high-level visits, the establishment of US-operated Patriot anti-missile batteries in Israel, and emergency military supplies. The US utilized careful language when addressing the issue, acknowledging Israel’s realist right to self-defense while simultaneously encouraging them to avoid acting upon that right unilaterally. Incentives included the United States assuming the cost of Scud hunting, demonstrating that there was nothing that Israel could do that the US was not able to do with less risk. The US also provided several hundred million dollars in aid on top of the already generous military aid package provided annually. Finally, information denial was observed as related to Gulf operations in order to complicate and therefore deter potential IDF involvement in Iraq.

Context Today: Iranian Nuclear Development, Israel, and the United States

While the United States’ interests in Iran should be viewed in the context of US strategy in the region at large, Iran’s push towards increasing its nuclear capability is unique. With that in mind, the United States’ primary interests in Iran center on concerns about the security of the United States, its citizens, and US allies and partners. As highlighted in the National Security Strategy for 2015 released by the Executive Branch on February 6, 2015, the United States strives, “...for a world without nuclear weapons and ensuring nuclear materials do not fall into the hands of irresponsible states and violent non-state actors.” The same document explicitly cites concerns with Iran, stating that it is necessary to establish an international order that promotes peace, security, and opportunity by pursuing “…a stable Middle East and North Africa by countering terrorism,

preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, and reducing the underlying sources of conflict,”—highlighting its commitment to the Prague Agenda’s goal of stopping the spread of nuclear weapons and materials.\textsuperscript{178}

The Prague Agenda—announced by President Barack Obama in April 2009—outlines near term steps that should be taken to keep nuclear weapons out of the hands of terrorists. This includes reducing the number of nuclear weapons and materials currently held by nuclear states, as well as preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons to additional states such as Iran. This includes holding countries that have violated their obligations under the international non-proliferation regime accountable. However, the Agenda also emphasizes allowing for the development of peaceful nuclear power projects under the condition that they are implemented in such a way that there is a reduction in the distribution of weapons-oriented technologies.\textsuperscript{179} More generally, others have described the Obama administration’s stated policy towards Iran as one that seeks to “prevent—not contain—a nuclear-armed Iran.”\textsuperscript{180} The ultimate objective of US policy is “…eliminating the threats posed by the regime’s pursuit of nuclear capability, support for terrorism, and abuse of its own citizenry.”\textsuperscript{181}

Current negotiations are being held between Iran, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Russia, and China (P5+1) —enabled by the European Union. In light of the final deadline for P5+1 in June, this document carefully utilizes language that leaves the strategy for achieving its desired outcome flexible, demonstrating confidence in Iran’s commitment to cooperate. If successful, US-Iranian relations may significantly improve for the first time since the Iranian Revolution in 1979. For example, the document states that the United States “…is testing whether it is possible to achieve a comprehensive resolution to assure the international community that Iran’s nuclear program is peaceful, while the Joint Plan of Action has halted the progress of Iran’s program.” The Joint Plan of Action—established by the P5+1 and Iran in January 2014—represents the first time in

nearly ten years that Iran willingly agreed to take steps towards stopping the advance of its nuclear program.\textsuperscript{182} This includes increasing access for inspectors as well as reversing many of its current initiatives. In return for taking the agreed upon actions, the P5+1 and the European Union agreed to provide targeted relief to Iran in installments over a six month period, valued between six billion to seven billion dollars, and delivered in such a way that the majority of sanctions remain in place during this same period. The idea is that once it is confirmed that Iran is acting on its agreed-upon commitments, sanctions on Iran’s petrochemical exports, the import of automotive manufacturing services, export of precious metals, and other critical sectors will be suspended.

The timeline for the implementation of the Joint Plan of Action was originally slated to end on July 20, 2014, at which time the IAEA would confirm or deny Iran’s fulfillment of its commitments. However, the IAEA extended this date to June 30, 2015 with the United States’ blessing.\textsuperscript{183} Current talks are aimed at achieving a comprehensive resolution that address the United States’ concerns over the nuclear program before this extended deadline is reached. Again, the language used by the Executive is noncommittal, stating in regards to the ‘comprehensive solution’ that “…nothing is agreed to until everything is agreed to...for the sake of our national security and the peace and security of the world, now is the time to give diplomacy a chance to succeed.”\textsuperscript{184} It is clear that the Executive would like to enable Iran to have access to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. However, it makes it clear that it will keep all options on the table to prevent Iran from producing a nuclear weapon. While the National Security Strategy does not mention Israel specifically in this regard, it does highlight that this endeavor is directed at seeking stability in the Middle East and “resolving the world’s concerns”— referring no doubt to those of several regional partners, including Israel.\textsuperscript{185}

\textbf{US Perspective}\textsuperscript{186}

\textsuperscript{186} Section authored by Shane Fischman.
The United States’ interests in the region include overcoming decades of negative relations with Iran. Simultaneously, the US is determined to maintain key relationships with Arab nations to address common challenges, including the proliferation of nuclear weapons based on President Obama’s Prague Initiative, radical extremism, and terrorism. In regards to Israel, the United States tacitly acknowledges that Israel remains its most reliable partner in the Middle East since 1948.\footnote{United States Department of State. US Relations with Israel. Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, Fact Sheet. March 10, 2014, http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3581.htm} With that in mind, it is not at present in the United States’ interest for bilateral relations to sour, or for Israel to engage in renewed regional conflict. That is one major reason why the United States provides Israel with over three billion dollars in foreign military financing annually.\footnote{United States Department of State. Foreign Military Financing Account Summary. http://www.state.gov/t/pm/ppa/sat/c14560.htm}

**Executive strategy: Considerations of wider regional repercussions**

The activities taking place now may represent the nascent stages of what some have termed a “Grand Bargain” strategy. The totality of this approach would entail, in no particular order, an offer of increased concessions towards Iran to include increasingly normalized relations, security guarantees, and the freedom to adopt a more influential role in the politics of the Gulf.\footnote{Hurst, Steven. “Obama and Iran”. International Politics, Vol. 49, 5, 545-567. Macmillan Publishers Ltd. 2012.} This would also include the “right to a fuel cycle” in exchange for adherence to the demands of the P5+1, to include rigorous monitoring and inspections to ensure that nuclear weaponization does not take place.

This worries Israel—from the viewpoint of the Obama administration—in several ways. The region is highly interconnected, and developments in one area often have far-reaching effects elsewhere, even if such effects are not immediately apparent. Israel, as one of the top three economic and military power-players in the broader Middle East is particularly sensitive to such developments.\footnote{International Monetary Fund. “Growth and Stability in the Middle East and North Africa: Economic Overview”.} Based on rhetoric coming from the Israeli political elite, it is clear that the nuclear negotiations and the subsequent cancellation of sanctions could work to increasingly alienate not only Israel from the United States but also other partners in the region. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) may not particularly fear a direct nuclear attack, but is concerned about the secondary and tertiary effects of a nuclear-
armed Iran. These issues include the potential for nuclear accident, the initiation of a nuclear arms race, and an uptick in Iranian extraterritorial activity aimed at increasing its own regional standing. Israel shares these concerns, but these threats are compounded by the fact that many Israelis also experience an existential fear for the survival of their nation—demographically, politically, and in terms of physical security—in the event of a nuclear strike. This fear has been exacerbated by the often incendiary rhetoric of Iran’s former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who made direct threats to “wipe Israel off the map.” Israeli analysts often assert that it may be impossible to establish a deterrent relationship with Iran, whose leadership may not be entirely rational.\(^\text{191}\) However, some Israeli commentators acknowledge that fears as expressed through official government channels may be inflated in order to ensure that the Obama administration maintains a hard line against Iran in alignment with Israeli national security interests.\(^\text{192}\)

That being said, the United States has feared in the past that Israel would seriously consider launching a unilateral strike against Iranian nuclear facilities—not unlike fears held by the Bush administration of Israeli unilateral action during the 1991 Scud middle attacks.\(^\text{193}\) Just as the acquisition of a nuclear weapon by Iran would have secondary effects, it is also true that an Israeli nuclear strike against Iranian facilities would have widespread repercussions. Due to the number and construction of several of Iran’s facilities, it is unlikely that any strikes—unilaterally conducted by Israel or otherwise—would have the desired effect of completely deterring Iranian nuclear ambitions.\(^\text{194}\) In fact, such an action may increase anti-Israeli sentiment throughout the region, and could invite either retaliation with conventional weapons or via Iranian proxies.\(^\text{195}\) Another secondary outcome—and one that is illuminating for the purposes of this report—is that the relationship between the US executive and current Israeli leadership would further deteriorate. Hurst and a wide array of media sources have noted that there are already many misgivings held by Benjamin Netanyahu and other members of the Likud Party towards the Obama administration, which it views as generally unsympathetic to the views of the Israeli Right.\(^\text{196}\)


\(^{193}\) Diamond, Jeremy. “Could military force still be used against Iran?” CNN, April 2, 2015.


\(^{196}\) Ibid.
Views from Congress and the Public: Threat Perception

The actions of the Obama administration and the professional defense and diplomacy bureaucracy with respect to Iran have encountered substantial domestic opposition. Congress has demonstrated its sensitivity to Israeli concerns for decades by issuing both condemnatory resolutions and public denouncements of policies originating in the executive branch that appear to threaten Israeli security.\(^{197}\) Support for Israel has been paired with generally punitive approaches towards Iran, with members of Congress continuing to push for more comprehensive sanctions during ongoing negotiations.\(^{198}\) Opposition to the current negotiations are most visibly emanating from the Republican right, who in addition to opposing Obama’s agenda more generally, have also advocated Israeli security issues in Congress. Therefore, while many on the Hill share the administration’s view that the US should refrain from implementing new punitive sanctions until the outcome of the negotiations is known, others perceive Iran—and the threats that emanate from it—in alignment with Netanyahu’s stated concerns. In a written statement, House Speaker John Boehner (R., Ohio) articulated this attitude in regards to the address that Netanyahu gave to Congress in February 2015, “In this time of challenge, I am asking the prime minister to address Congress on the grave threats radical Islam and Iran pose to our security and way of life.”\(^{199}\) In this view, Iran is perceived to pose some manner of security threat to the United States.

In consideration of Congress’ views on the Iranian nuclear deal, public opinion must not be discounted. A Pew Research Poll from early 2015 highlighted that Americans were in favor of direct US-Iran negotiations by a margin of 49 to 40. Similarly timed polling conducted by ABC and the Washington Post found that approximately 59 percent of people supported a nuclear deal with Iran; and a CNN/ORC poll found that 68 percent supported direct talks that specifically prevented Iran from developing a nuclear weapon.\(^{200}\) However, these findings were paired with the widely held belief that negotiations will have the desired effect of fully preventing Iran’s attainment of a nuclear weapon in the long run. Despite this, we


\(^{199}\) Ibid.

can more generally conclude that in the present moment the US public supports negotiations by a small margin. However, the same Pew poll also revealed that 62 percent of those polled would want Congress to have the final say on whether or not a deal is approved—not the executive. This desire became a reality in April 2015 when Obama agreed to sign a compromise version of legislation on Iran that allows Congress to weigh in on the nuclear deal. This concession was in response to an alliance of Republicans and Democrats who sought congressional oversight on the final structure of the nuclear framework—arguing that it is Congress that ultimately has the authority to modify the current sanctions regime.\textsuperscript{201} The impact of this development is yet unknown as we approach the June 30, 2015 deadline. However, the key point here is that the data suggests that the American public—while opposing Iran’s acquisition of a nuclear weapon—generally believes that this contingency is not threatening enough to disrupt ongoing diplomacy by rushing to impose more punitive measures such as sanctions.

\textit{US Perspective: Key Takeaways}

The differences in threat perception between the United States and Israel are clear. The United States is not threatened by Iran’s nuclear ambitions in terms of demography, politics, or physical security to the same level that Israel is. Iran does not regularly threaten to destroy what is has termed the “Great Satan” in its public rhetoric despite the troubled history between these two countries. Even under the circumstance that Iran did develop a nuclear warhead, it would not have the technological capability to launch a strike that would reach US territory, though US citizens and property could be damaged in the event that a strike was initiated against a target in the region due to our large military presence in the region. Instead, we can classify the threat level posed by Iranian nuclear ambitions more narrowly as a potential threat to the security of the United States in the long-term, if at all. Negotiations would not be occurring if this were not the case, as Washington has clearly thought about the potential security implications on American interests in the region and at home if Iran obtains a nuclear weapon—if not from Iran directly, then from those who may benefit from proliferation from Iran or who develop nuclear weapons programs in response to Iran’s own acquisition.

We can also characterize the threat posed by Iran as a threat to specific US interests in the region, which—based on the definitions set out in our methodology—is security-based. The United States is interested in limiting the proliferation of nuclear weapons and material worldwide, but this threat is magnified in the Middle East by the presence of outwardly hostile extremist elements and a plethora of unstable regimes—the former of which actively strike at US targets. Given Iran’s history of providing arms and aid to terrorist groups,\(^{202}\) it is not illogical for the United States to be concerned that such powerful weapons may eventually find their way into a dirty bomb directed at US forces or allies—no matter how unlikely this scenario may be. None of these issues are imminent to the United States, however, but are certainly considered short-to-long term threats that must be addressed now to prevent their occurrence.

**US Threat Perceptions**

Based on our assessments above and the definitions laid out in the methodological section of this paper, we can classify United States threat assessments in terms of physical security and political considerations as follows:

*Physical Security Considerations*

Based on our research, the United States is not demographically threatened by Iranian nuclear development—peaceful or otherwise—in the near term. Instead, we must focus on what is physically at stake for the United States. Long term calculations about whether or not a nuclear warhead could be outfitted to an ICBM capable of reaching primary United States territory is currently unknowable, and is not being seriously considered in public discourse. While US embassies and military bases do exist in the Middle East, there is currently no indication that if such weapons existed, they would target them; nor would such attacks threaten the majority of Americans. Therefore we would not classify this as an existential threat by any means, and the United States does not utilize this term in its rhetoric, as Israel does. More immediate concerns that the United State might hold regarding Iranian nuclear developments would relate to the repercussions of emboldened conventional activity. This could lead to wider regional conflict, directly impacting the safety of US

personnel in the region. Many commentators have expressed the fear that a nuclear-armed Iran would become bolder in its encouragement and sponsorship of terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah. The latter would have the potential to launch more frequent and increasingly deadly attacks against United States personnel and property, as well as hinder strategic objectives in the region.

**Political Considerations**

Since 2009, the Obama administration has worked to decrease tensions between the United States and Iran through increased dialogue both with elites in Tehran and through public appeals. Early into his tenure as president, Obama invited more cooperation between the two countries by delivering a Nowruz (Iranian New Year) greeting, in which he stated,

“The process will not be advanced by threats. We seek instead engagement that is honest and grounded in mutual respect.” 203 Now that negotiations are under way in alignment with his early appeal for cooperative dialogue, the United States has quite a bit at stake politically in regards to its international credibility. The failure of the negotiations, or the attainment of an Iranian nuclear weapon, could therefore present a considerable threat. This would be particularly true if the Obama administration did an about-face and implemented harsher sanctions or agreed to move forward with the use of force. Therefore, we may characterize the political threat emanating from the Iranian nuclear question as it relates to United States security interests on the political level as one that is short-term, or likely to manifest—if at all—in the next 1-5 years. We can also classify this as a medium level of threat, as there seems to be a fairly equal split between experts whether or not these negotiations will bear fruit.204

**The Israeli Perspective**205

Before the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, Israel viewed Iran as one of its partners, balancing unfriendly Israel’s neighbors. Since the 1979 Revolution, Iran remained peripheral to Israel’s primary interests in the region. With the end of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988 and the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the role of Iran as part of Israel’s security doctrine started

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204 Interview with Gary Sick, New York, March 15, 2015
205 Section authored by Marwan Ezz al-Arab.
to diminish. The relationship further cooled after Israel started to receive information on Iranian nuclear development projects. Israel’s stance on Iran has changed ever since Iran started to become a more influential player in the region. Once the Iranian regime sought regional leadership – both military and political – by cultivating regional clients and broadening its nuclear program, Israel’s interests were directly engaged.

In recent years, the confrontation between Israel and Iran has taken many forms, from mutual accusations of killing each other’s citizens to proxy wars and cyberattacks. During the 2006 Lebanon War, Iran reportedly assisted Hezbollah groups in their attacks on Israel. In 2010, Israel was accused of responsibility for a series of assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists. The same year, Iran claimed that the US and Israel engineered attacks by a computer virus, Stuxnet, on its nuclear facilities. In 2011, Israel seized a ship from Syria bringing Iranian weapons to Gaza on behalf of Hamas. Nonetheless, no direct military engagement between Israel and Iran has taken place.

**Israel’s Interests**

Israel’s primary interest lies in its concept of national security, which has always been the highest priority. Given the history of military confrontations with the surrounding states, Israel’s primary concern with its national security involves the country’s interest in the preservation of the stable balance of power in the region. Iran’s growing military capabilities touch upon this Israel’s interest in maintaining stable relationships with neighboring states.

**National Security Perspective**

In order to provide security to the nation at large, Israel uses diplomacy and intelligence, and armed forces supplied with the latest weapons systems. Thus, Israel’s vital interest include guaranteeing the security of the land and its citizens.

Israel has remained skeptical of the P5+1 negotiations with Iran. While President Obama’s objective is to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons, Prime Minister

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208 Phone interview with David Makovsky, March, 2015.
Netanyahu advocated an agreement that would not allow Iran to keep centrifuges or any enriched material at all.\textsuperscript{209} To Israel, a good agreement with Iran would prevent Iran from producing enough fissionable material to create a single bomb within at least three years, contrary to the proposed one year.\textsuperscript{210} The level of deterrence that would be achieved by the framework agreement of April 2015 would not suffice, given Israel’s exposure to threats. In Israel’s eyes, without more intrusive inspections at all sites, there is no assurance that even the proposed one-year period for anticipating an Iranian breakout capacity would be achieved.

\textbf{Israeli Threat Perceptions}

While attitudes toward Iran reflect Israel’s national security perspective that is widely shared by different constituencies and groups,\textsuperscript{211} Israelis’ opinions differ on the kind and severity of the threats emanating from Iran and how these threats can be dealt with.\textsuperscript{212} In the Israeli policy debates there are two general approaches to what kind of threats Iran constitutes: an “existentialist” approach and “dire threats” approach.\textsuperscript{213}

\textit{“Existentialist” Approach – Existential Threat (security, long-term, medium)}

Supporters of the “existentialist” approach view Iran as a state that is ultimately hostile to Israel and poses an existential threat, which needs to be deal with by any means possible.\textsuperscript{214} Prime Minister Netanyahu sees Iran through the prism of this threat and thus leads the group of supporters of the “existentialist” approach. Similar to some Israelis’ perception of the Arab states posing an existential threat to Israel, their perception of Iran is viewed as a state hostile to Israel. In recent years a few Iranian officials have made strong public statements against Israel, which fueled the perception of an existential threat from Iran.\textsuperscript{215} In the case of military confrontation that involves nuclear weapons – even a single

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{210} Herzog, Michael. “Israel Views Extension of Iran Talks as Lesser of Two Evils”. \textit{Al-Monitor} 25 November 2014.
\item \textsuperscript{211} Phone interview with Ilan Goldberg, March 18, 2015.
\item \textsuperscript{212} Freilich, Charles D. “Striking Iran: The Debate in Israel.” Survival 54.6 (2012): 93–106. ProQuest. 11 Jan. 2015
\item \textsuperscript{213} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{214} Interview with Charles D. Freilich, April 17, 2015.
\item \textsuperscript{215} Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (Tehran), October 27, 2005 as cited in Yoaz Hendel’s “Iran’s Nukes and Israel’s Dilemma.” Israeli Defence, July 2, 2006.
\end{itemize}
nuclear strike – the entire territory of Israel, with its 8.2 million citizens, would be affected. Considering that the Holocaust was a central cause of massive immigration of European Jews in 1940s and remains vivid in Israeli popular consciousness, the fear of nuclear strike is very much present in both Israel’s political and civil discussions.216

“Dire Threats” Approach - Regional Instability (physical and political, short-term, high)

Advocates of the more moderate “dire threats” approach do not view Iran as an existential threat, but do recognize Iran as a state that instigates regional instability.217 In their opinion Israel should use everything within reason – such as all its diplomatic and political tools – to protect itself from Iran and to prevent further regional instability. For example, military and political threats from Iran include its sponsorship of the Lebanese organization Hezbollah, which possesses 100,000 rockets and resides in the neighboring country.218 Given that Hezbollah and Israel have opposed each other in several conflicts, including the 2006 Lebanon War, Iran’s financial and military assistance for Hezbollah poses a threat to Israel’s security in the near term.219 Additionally, if Iran becomes militarily stronger, other Arab countries might decide to align themselves with it.220 In the ongoing civil war in Yemen, many experts have alleged that the rebellious Houthis have been proxies for and received weapons and training from Iran. Iran has also been supporting pro-Assad forces in the Syrian Civil War.221 Such a situation may change the balance of power in the Middle East and threaten American and Israeli interests in the region. Iran’s rising influence within Iraq since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, and especially since the departure of American forces, further reveals its regional ambitions. However, advocates of "dire threats," such as the former chief of Mossad, Meir Dagan, and the former head of Shin Bet, Yuval Diskin, argue that Israel can protect itself against Iran. Hence, they believe that Israel’s security establishment should not endorse preventative military action.222

Israel’s Options

217 Interview with Charles D. Freilich, April 17, 2015.
218 Phone interview with David Makovsky, March, 2015
219 Phone interview with David Makovsky, March, 2015
221 Phone interview with David Makovsky, March, 2015
222 Kalman, Aaron. “Former Mossad chief defends decision to defy Netanyahu on Iran.” The Times of Israel April 26, 2013.
Israel's strategies require supportive actions as well as pressures from the international community, because an adequate response to threats posed by Iran falls outside Israel’s scope of actions.\footnote{223} One common perception is that challenges posed by Iran constitute the biggest strategic threat to Israel and to US allies in the region.\footnote{224} Depending on the option the Israeli leadership decides to take, the relationship between the US and Israel will be either impaired or strengthened.

\textit{Preventative operations}

This option stems from the view that Iran today poses an existential threat to Israel and necessitates a preventive strike. Contingency plans for deploying this option, have apparently not been tempered by dissenting voices within the national security and policy elite. The notion of acknowledging that Israel’s own nuclear program may pose a lower or less immediate level of threat to others has apparently not been seriously considered, and the prospect of eventual cooperation with Iran is certainly remote.\footnote{225} The likely fallouts from the call for military action against Iran are diminished credibility of the government\footnote{226} (if a strike does not take a place), exacerbation of regional instability\footnote{227}, and a worsened relationship with the US\footnote{228}.

\textit{Advocating for not removing the sanctions on Iran}

This option reiterates Israel’s assessment of some threats coming from Iran, but it calls for a diplomatic solution to dire threats from Iran. Assuming threats from Iran’s nuclear program persist, Israel will remain wary of a multilateral nuclear accord with Iran and will oppose the lifting of sanctions. Since Israel does not have many options available – and a military strike is not an option at the present – its leaders will likely continue to urge the international community to remain vigilant against Iran.\footnote{229} However, economic sanctions

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\item \footnote{224} Phone interview with David Makovsky, March, 2015
\item \footnote{225} Interview with Alex Vatanka, Washington, D.C., February 11, 2015.
\item \footnote{226} Freilich, Charles D. “Striking Iran: The Debate in Israel.” Survival 54.6 (2012): 93–106. ProQuest. 11 Jan. 2015
\item \footnote{228} Interview with Gary Sick, March 2015.
\item \footnote{229} Interview with Natan Sachs, Washington, D.C., March 27, 2015.
\end{itemize}
may not lead to the desired effect and may actually impede the long-awaited diplomatic resolution with Iran.\textsuperscript{230}

\textit{Accepting the current nuclear agreement with Iran}

This option assumes at least a possibility of living with a nuclear Iran, even if the US achieves a significant postponement of the Iranian nuclear program.\textsuperscript{231} Similar to the option of economic sanctions, Israel's accepting the current nuclear agreement relies on a diplomatic resolution of the ongoing tensions with Iran. In addition, under this option, Israel will try to induce the Obama Administration to make an explicit statement of the measures to be taken if Iran becomes noncompliant with its nuclear program.\textsuperscript{232} Even so, some policy analysts believe that a warming-up of Israel-Iran relations may evolve if we take into account the most recent statements by US officials that demonstrate a willingness to reestablish broad cooperation between the US and Iran.\textsuperscript{233} In the interim, as long as US and Israeli strategic interests remain parallel, the security partnership will be invigorated by American reassurance of continuous cooperation on the Iranian issue.\textsuperscript{234}

\textbf{Conclusion and Policy Recommendations}

The United States, in pursuit of its national security interests, may choose several courses of action based on the current geopolitical environment. When considering the future of the US-Israel security partnership, one cannot wholly discount the possibility that current rapprochement efforts with Iran will contribute to a weakening of the US-Israeli relationship over time—and that the United States, depending on the policies of the administration at that point in time, would find this acceptable. If there is the right balance of support for such a shift within the executive branch, the professional defense and diplomatic bureaucracy, Congress, and the public—a tilt away from Israel in favor of bolstering ties with other nations in the region is not out of the question. However, for the time being it is premature to anticipate such a reality, as the current nuclear deal is in its nascence and the final outcome has yet to be determined.\textsuperscript{235} The United States has been

\textsuperscript{230} Nephew, Richard. "Now's not time for more Iran sanctions." CNN, February 6, 2015.

\textsuperscript{231} Interview with Yaacov Kedmi, former head of Lishkat Hakesher, on Iton.tv November 20, 2014.

\textsuperscript{232} Interview with Richard Nephew, New York, March 12, 2015.

\textsuperscript{233} Interview with Alex Vatanka, Washington, D.C., February 11, 2015

\textsuperscript{234} Interview with Richard Nephew, New York, March 12, 2015.

\textsuperscript{235} Interview with Professor Charles Freilich, New York, April 17, 2015.
leveraging sanctions against Iran since 1979 and it will take time to reverse the tensions that have resulted.

However, if the United States seeks both to achieve its policy objectives in regards to Iran and to maintain its robust security relationship with Israel, it could pursue its targeted policies while reassuring Israel that the US-Israeli partnership remains strong. Drawing on the 1991 Scud incident as precedent, several diplomatic tactics may be effective in the Iran case. Again, it will be necessary to use a “carrot and stick” method. The goal—first and foremost—must be to receive a guarantee that Israel will not launch a preventative strike against Iran, particularly before the outcome of the current round of nuclear negotiations are known.

In this context, it is necessary to reassure and reassess Israeli views and intent on Iran at every critical juncture of the negotiations. Increased communication and high-level visits by US officials with practitioner roles in the Department of Defense and Department of State will work to bolster personal ties beyond the Executive and Congress, foster good will, and increase informal and formal communication between governments. Trust is necessary—not just at a procedural level but also at the personal level, as officials must be able to rely on the word of their counterparts that an action will be taken.

Not unlike the United States’ assurance of US protection by installing Patriot anti-missile batteries in Israel (though they proved to be ineffective against Scuds), the United States may choose to guarantee a US nuclear umbrella over Israel in the event that Iran does develop a weapon, with the goal of deterring nuclear attacks against them. While Israel purportedly has its own arsenal of nuclear weapons, it has not acknowledged this fact in public doctrine. A publicly announced guarantee of protection by the United States could do wonders to reassure both the government and the people there that they will not be attacked with nuclear weapons. Such an action would not necessarily require any restructuring of the US strategic force and may not necessitate a change in current levels of foreign military aid being given to Israel on an annual basis.

Finally, the United States must also make it clear that a kinetic strike is totally unacceptable, and that such an action would have dire consequences for the future of the US-Israeli partnership. As it stands, Israel would prefer for the United States to do the work for

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them. A unilateral strike from Israel on Iran would have significant logistical challenges, as jets must pass through unfriendly airspace and would likely have to refuel mid-flight once their payload has been released. By Israeli calculus, the United States—if it had the mind—could do this better or at least provide the necessary assistance to enable them to conduct operations on their own.

REFERENCES


Arab Insurrections

The US and Israel differ less in their strategic perspectives on the Arab uprisings than on the issues discussed above. Even so, there are significant disparities in their evaluations and strategic responses to the 2011 events. This section will focus on two main questions: i)
what are the main convergences and divergences regarding the proliferation of militant organizations and the required counterterrorism responses in the region? And ii) what are the fundamental differences between the US and Israel concerning the prospects of democracy in the Middle East?

Instead of trying to address the full range of regional developments and daily transfigurations in the region, this section will specifically be focused on Egypt, Syria, and the rise of indigenous Salafi extremist groups, and how the developments in these three main areas of concern has an effect on the US Israeli security relationship.

According to Tamara Cofman Wittes, “the US-Egypt security partnership is valuable for targeting violent extremists and containing Iran, while Egypt’s peace with Israel is a cornerstone of regional—not to mention Israeli—security.”237 Embracing this philosophy, this section will discuss the regional developments with the understanding that without peace—or at the minimum cooperation—with Egypt, both the US and Israel will be unable to achieve their regional security priorities, and their intentions in countering terrorism, or establishing order, will be moot.

Introduction

The term “Arab Spring” only a few short years ago sparked fierce debate about the likelihood of democratic transitions, government accountability, and participatory governance in the Middle East. It was the answer to the cries of the people, and it had the citizens of the world glued to their TV screens and newspapers for months. Today, however, it is seen as the climax of dictatorial regimes and the consequence of mixed religion and politics. It created a region where non-state actors and civil wars are the norm, and gave birth to ISIS, a Jihadist group with unprecedented power and influence.

The Middle East has not experienced change of this magnitude since the defeat and dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in the wake of World War I. Popular uprisings that began in Tunisia in late 2010 spread to neighboring countries including Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain. The unexpected eruption of chaos from these countries resulted in the overthrow of key leaders such as Hosni Mubarak, Muammar Al Gaddafi, Zine El Abidine Ben

Ali, and Ali Abdallah Saleh, which sent shock waves throughout the region, with many questioning what the future orientation of the Middle East would look like.

What caused the outbreak of revolution in the Middle East has been the source of many discussions among the world’s security elite. Omar Ashour with the Brookings Institution argues that the uprisings developed out of the nature of the security establishments in Arab countries: a lack of transparency, government accountability and suppression of human rights and the rule of law.238 Additionally, while the dictatorships affected by the Arab Spring all exhibited their own unique qualities, they also shared many critical themes. Mubarak, Qaddafi, Assad and Saddam Hussein all made sure their citizens had little room for civil engagement and political organization, yielding conditions for distrust and disorganization when their regimes collapsed.239

This broken societal fabric prevented these uprisings from establishing democratic order. While the Arab Spring gave a voice to the civilians who took to the streets in protest of their governments and in demand of something more, since its outbreak Freedom House rated the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region the least free. According to their statistics, 85 percent of the people residing in this region lack basic political and human rights.240 This is critical, because many have surmised that part of the appeal of fundamentalism is the alternative it offers to current governmental regimes.

This in particular is part of the Jihadi success in Syria.241 While the Arab Spring was initially praised for giving voice to the people, as violence and terror hijacked this previously laudable movement and morphed it into an unrecognizable quest for fundamentalist control, violent, non-state actors have achieved a new level of prestige culminating in the rise of Jihadist groups with unprecedented power and influence. In many ways, extremists have it easy: from the point of view of the people, these dictatorships have the support of Western regimes and have been suppressing their voice for decades. It is a knee jerk reaction to support a group combatting the same dictatorships they wish to overthrow. Jihadi logic is difficult to refute and widely attractive. In some cases, where political reform successfully

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developed out of peaceful protests, extremists lost their command. But in Syria, where Assad clings to power, their message has the most resonance.242

Today, instead of celebrating the power of the people’s voice, many Middle Eastern experts and policy makers are nostalgic for the stability and order of the old dictatorial regimes. Even in 2011, pundits and practitioners were skeptical of the chances of the Syrian uprisings ending quickly with the fall of Assad. Initially, some experts predicted the benefits of the fall of Assad and the rise of democracy as a partner for establishing peace in the Arab-Israeli conflict and US counter-terrorism efforts.243 244 However, after years of civil war, Syria has become an extremist hotbed - a feeding ground for radical and fundamentalist groups.

The most critical implications of the Arab Spring for the US-Israeli relationship concern Egypt, Syria, and the expansion and growth of extremist groups. Israeli and American experts differed widely in their initial assessment of the Arab Spring and its meaning for the region. Most notable was their opinions concerning the probability of democracy in the region: Israel was skeptical of the chances of the Middle East going democratic, while the US and her European allies were hasty in their conclusion that Egypt resembled Iran in 1979 and Berlin in 1989.245 However despite these distinctive analyses, the developments in these countries are pertinent to American-Israeli security cooperation.

Of all of the nations that underwent social, political, and economic transformations, Egypt stands out as the most important nation concerning the American-Israeli security partnership. The importance of Egypt to the entire region cannot be overestimated: Egypt is the most populous Arab State, it shares a direct border with Israel, it is responsible for two key water routes (the Suez Canal and the Straits of Tiran), and it was also the first Arab state to sign a peace treaty with Israel in 1979.

With differing values, and interests ranging from global jihad to Middle East expansion, extremism has anchored itself in the region’s mayhem, capitalizing on the unstable governments, the dissatisfaction of the people and the religious fire that burns from Persian Gulf to the Arabian Peninsula. They have expanded and evolved into an institution dominated by factions but sustained by continued regional instability. A movement that is

244 Berman, “The Promise of the Arab Spring.”
entirely dependent on demand, the success of these groups and their danger to Western values is rooted in their appeal to everyone—Westerners, Arabs, converts and believers from birth. This means different things for the US and Israel, and while it hasn't been at the forefront of US-Israeli security conversations, it will have a lasting impact on the two countries' future security cooperation.

**Historical antecedent: The Fall of Mubarak**

While the events of 2011 caught every country around the world off guard, no one was more shocked than the United States. Only a year and a half before the 2011 Egyptian revolution President Barack Obama was in Cairo giving a speech about a “New Beginning” at al-Azhar University, discussing topics such as democracy, women’s rights and how Islam and the West could combat extremism together. Eighteen months later, his words were put to the test when millions of Egyptians took to the streets and demanded the removal of Hosni Mubarak. While Israel watched on in concern as their most formidable ally in the region was pushed out of power, President Obama was less certain of what his reaction should be: should he side with peaceful protestors seeking a transition towards democracy, or should he stand by a long-term ally of the United States? According to Marc Thiessen of the Washington Post, Obama’s decision to initially stand with Mubarak alienated the Egyptian revolutionaries.246

The Egyptian uprising was most troubling for status quo powers in the Middle East—among them Israel and Saudi Arabia. Therefore, amidst a sea of diplomatic silence, Israel launched emergency airlifts in Egypt, evacuating Israeli tourists and diplomats, as the streets of Cairo became a gathering point for civil unrest.247 Israel was shocked with the Obama administration’s reaction to the uprising: from the outset, Israel was much more dubious about the uprisings’ promise for democracy.248 David Ottoway with the Wilson Center explains that even though Morsi respected the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, and made no attempt to upset the Israeli-Egyptian relationship, Israel was still skeptical about what this new regime would mean for its security.249 Khaled Elgindy of the Brookings Institution explained that during the Muslim Brotherhood’s ascent to power, the US was preoccupied with safeguarding Israeli-Egyptian peace in its relations with the Morsi

248 Natan Sachs, Personal interview. 27 March 2015.
249 David Ottoway. Personal interview. 27 March 2015.
government. Morsi’s support for the two-state solution during his tenure is a testament to the importance of the Egyptian-Israeli-US triangle.250

Less than two years later, however, the same scenario was repeated. Obama was plagued by indecisiveness, paralyzed by the age-old American question: support the democratic process, even if it means subjecting a country to years of poor policy, or support a coup—the antithesis of the American creed—because it means better security? Mohamed Morsi managed to achieve in one year what it took Mubarak thirty years to do—antagonize and ultimately alienate the Egyptian people.251 The Obama administration took little notice as Morsi amassed authoritarian powers and began courting a friendship with Iran and Hamas. However when mass protests broke out again, the US government repeated the same mistake and chose to side with the unpopular president. US Ambassador to Egypt Anne Patterson is quoted as saying, “Some say that street action will produce better results than elections, to be honest, my government and I are deeply skeptical.”252 This statement resulted in increasing anti-American sentiment among Egyptian secularists.

By June 2013, the state of affairs in Egypt was so far out of control, with daily protests, a depleting economy, and no real effort by the MB to remedy the situation that the Armed Forces felt compelled to act. Subsequently on June 30th 2013 General Sisi, the Commander in Chief of the Egyptian Armed Forces, removed the Muslim Brotherhood from power. Many Egyptians welcomed Sisi’s role in terminating fundamentalist Islamic rule, while others viewed Sisi and the Army as the institution that killed any hopes of a democracy emerging in Egypt. Regardless of what the case may be, Sisi and the Army achieved firm control of the country. What proceeded next was a brutal crackdown on all MB members and their supporters, and continuous human rights violations including the detention of journalists and anti-military supporters.

This placed the Obama administration in a difficult position. Although US law required a cut-off of the large amounts of financial aid Egypt had been receiving from the United States since 1979, the President simply refused to characterize the coup as a coup, an action which antagonized MB supporters and Islamists in the region.

Though the uprisings in Egypt ushered in an era of souring US-Egyptian relations, with Sisi’s rise the Israeli-Egyptian security relationship has reached an historic high.

250 Khaled Elgindy. Personal interview. 27 March 2015.
Elgindy maintains that Sisi’s strong ideological stance against Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood has locked Egypt in a precarious position within the region, but the members of the US-Israel-Egypt triangle have never agreed more on cooperation in combating terrorism and countering the rise of a fundamentalist order.

The US Perspective

In the wake of the Arab Spring, the US found itself in a compromised position, attempting to pursue American values whilst protecting American interests. While wishing to promote the pro-democracy values that the US holds tightly, the US did not want to jeopardize its national security and economic interests, which relied upon authoritarian leaders with whom it had been associated. This push and pull of values and interests can help shed some light on why the US’ response to the Arab uprisings was rather muddled, lacking a clear strategic vision.

Critics of President Obama and his administration’s Middle East policy have highlighted their disappointment at what they view as improvisational policies that have been detrimental to American leadership in the region. In essence, the US had two perspectives concerning the uprisings that took place. The first, more optimistic perspective, supported by people such as Paul Wolfowitz, was to assume its role as the promoter of democracy, and encourage the countries experiencing uprisings to exercise non-violent protests, hoping that they would eventually result in a peaceful transition to democracy, thereby protecting US security interests rooted in democratic peace theory. The second camp, supported by people such as Mitt Romney, perceived the uprisings as a risk to stability and the security interests of the United States. Deteriorating order, and the collapse of authoritarian allies made the US more vulnerable.

The tension between contradictory impulses was evident in US responses to unrest throughout the region, as the situation on the ground evolved. This highlights how the administration was adopting a reactive approach to developing events, rather than a proactive approach that could have better shaped events in its favor.

253 Khaled Elgindy. Personal interview. 27 March 2015.
The prolonged experience of being tied down in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan has made the current US administration cautious of intervening again in another Middle Eastern state. With the Obama administration intent on reducing the US military presence in the Middle East, and US public opinion largely unfavorable to further entanglement in the region, it would be difficult to justify direct military engagement in an additional Arab state. At the same time, with American ideals and its assumed role in upholding international principles, it would also be difficult not to support, in some way or another, a genuine people’s movement declaring values of democracy, freedom and human rights.

**US Interests**

In the region at large, the United States’ main concerns include dismantling terrorist networks that threaten its citizens, confronting aggression against allies and partners, ensuring the free passage of oil and other energy sources from the region, as well as preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. All of these concerns are either directly or indirectly perceived as potential threats to the security and interests of the United States.

With the eruption of chaos across the Middle East and the intensification of conflict over the past five years, the US’ main interests have been primarily focused on preserving the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, attempting to bring stability to the region, attempting to mediate an agreed peace agreement between Israel and Palestine, and countering the extremist Islamist ideology threat that has spread in the Middle East due to the power vacuum created in states such as Libya, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen.

**Proliferation of Extremist Groups**

Since 2010, a proliferation of Salafi extremists groups has occurred in Syria. But while Syria has been the gathering ground for these groups, data shows that as of 2013, there was a 58 percent increase in the number of Jihadi groups operating in the MENA region, with Syria acting as their sanctuary. Al-Qaida affiliated groups have grown exponentially both in membership and in the number of launched attacks— in 2013, ISIS contributed to 43 percent of this violence, al-Shabab accounted for 25 percent, Jabhat al-Nusra 21 percent and al-Qaida
in the Arabian Peninsula was responsible for 10 percent.\textsuperscript{257} These numbers--already setting a historical record--were superseded by the more than 15,000 terrorist attacks committed in 2014.\textsuperscript{258}

The civil warfare and instability in Syria has had a profound impact on the fragile environment of its neighbor, Iraq. The trauma inflicted on these two states' institutions, side-by-side, made for the ultimate breeding ground for jihadist groups and militias to rule and expand in freshly uncontrolled and un-policed territory, spanning the east of Syria to the north of Iraq. The unwillingness of successive governments in Baghdad to provide assurances to the disenfranchised Sunni minority enabled extremist Salafist groups in Iraq to gain new adherents. The rise of the Islamic State (ISIS) on the one hand, capitalized on disillusionment by Sunnis with the Iraqi government, and its success in attracting fighters from across the region and the world culminated in its volcanic show of force. The group's ability to make sweeping strategic gains across swaths of territory in such short period of time, its onslaught of ethnic cleansing campaigns, and murdering of westerners struck the international community as a new, more vicious breed of terrorism. As the Islamic State gains global traction, the new threats spreading to different corners of the globe have drawn the United States and its allies back into a region they effectively tried to withdraw from, both militarily and politically.

Rolling back the growth of these extremists groups is one of the core interests of the United States. However, with President Obama intent on decreasing the US military footprint in the region, the US cannot defeat the extremist groups alone. To conquer and vanquish the proliferation of fundamentalist organizations, the US will need the support of stable Arab states that are willing to partner both with each other and with the US in combating the extreme Islamic ideology that has severely plagued the Middle East for three decades. James Traub highlights that this is where US interests converge with both Arab and Israeli interests, since “the West cannot solve the problem of Islamic extremism; only the Islamic world itself can do that.”\textsuperscript{259} Furthermore, the failure of state institutions to provide assurances to citizens of all constituencies and protect minorities has led to the empowerment

\textsuperscript{259} Traub, James. "America Has Abdicated Its Guiding Role in the Middle East to a Sectarian Arab Military Force." Foreign Policy. 10 Apr. 2015.
of extremism and sectarian warfare. The United States must be able to understand that political legitimacy and delivery of socio-economic guarantees will be the only way to deter disaffected persons, suffering years of conflict and abuse of power, from joining the ranks of the more powerful jihadist groups.

Many of the countries weakened by the Arab Spring had previously served as the US’s most effective partners in counterterrorism. Since February 11, 2012, the US identified two new Islamic extremist terrorist groups active in Egypt. Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis and Mujahidin Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem were both added to the US list of active terror organizations in 2014.\textsuperscript{260} The reemergence of Egypt as a strong and stable military state has assuaged some concern for curtailing and thwarting terror activity in the region, but the unrest in Syria continues to foster fundamentalism.

\textit{Promotion of Democracy}

To achieve its security objectives, the US will be looking for stable Arab allies like Egypt with the ability to influence neighboring states. Shadi Hamid and Peter Mandville have termed this approach the Responsibility Doctrine, whereby the Obama administration has employed a strategy of “prodding other nations to shoulder the burdens of fostering a stable, peaceful international order.”\textsuperscript{261}

However, US security objectives are not the only interests of the US concerning the MENA region. If anything has been learned from the Arab revolutions, it is that authoritarian regimes do not last forever, and that they are extremely unstable. The US therefore has an interest in promoting democratic principles throughout the region, which can contribute to stability and decrease the likelihood of armed conflict with other democracies.\textsuperscript{262} A democratic Middle East will also give the bursting Arab youth bulge an opportunity to have their voice heard, and become more active in the development and future orientations of their respective states.

The Egyptian elections that brought Morsi to power were intended to stand as a beacon of democratic idealism in the Middle East. But in 2013, when the Egyptian military removed Mohamed Morsi from power, and the Obama administration saw its vision of

\textsuperscript{260} Ibid
democratic order crumble below the wheels of military tanks, the US expressed dissatisfaction with the flagrant violation of democratic norms. Additionally, the United States has made it a priority to see an improvement in the standard of human rights, and the freedom of journalists in the Middle East, as well as a more inclusive political system, and the fair treatment of political opponents.

As much as the US would like to see the return of stability throughout the region, the current US administration, and several members of Congress, have been hesitant to place a premium on stability at the expense of democratic principles. This predicament has placed not only the Obama administration, but also future administrations in a difficult position of having to decide whether to pursue stability in search of security while turning a blind eye on human rights violations, or pursuing the promotion of democracy and the protection of human rights, at the cost of the US relationship with the Egyptian military.

According to David Ignatius, “the risks of letting Egypt slide are simply too great for a responsible administration to ignore.” 263 Stephen Hadley, a former National Security advisor who was recently in Egypt meeting with President Sisi stated that, “Egypt is even more strategically important now than in the past because stabilizing the Middle East is crucial and we don’t have a lot of partners to help. If Egypt were to descend into chaos, that would compound the problem.” 264

The US considers Egypt to be of vital importance to the future stability and prospect of peace in the MENA region. Of primary importance is sustaining peace between Egypt and Israel, which has persisted for over thirty years. The United States, through the Multinational Force and Observers organization (MFO), has two bases in the Sinai Peninsula, which is home to 692 troops, the single largest contingent in the MFO. The objective of the MFO is to supervise the implementation of the security provisions of the Egyptian-Israeli Treaty of Peace and to employ its best efforts in preventing any violation of the agreement’s terms. 265 Also important to the US is the role Egypt has played in the Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations: they are the primary Arab mediator in addition to sharing borders with both Israel and the Gaza Strip.

Israeli security, with Egypt as the cornerstone of this interest, is key for the United States, for a number of reasons. Firstly, in the unlikely scenario of a breakdown in the

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264 Ibid
Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement, US regional credibility as a mediator would surely be challenged. Second, if the violence in the Sinai continues, and Israel gets involved, an accidental strike from either the Egyptian or Israeli military could raise tensions between the two states. This could escalate into a full-out war, putting the United States in an untenable position.

In addition to the MFO, the Joint Arab Military Force, whose formation was approved by the Arab League in March 2015, is an additional area of interest for the US. This organization could eventually help ease the region’s dependency on American troops and militaries to resolve regional problems. However, beyond the question of military competence, this organization’s efficiency and effectiveness will be challenged by internal disputes amongst Arab states, which could ultimately be this coalition’s breaking point. This was clear from the outset, with Lebanon and Iraq vociferously opposing the coalitions’ formation, denoting their fear that this force will further inflame the Sunni-Shia divide among Arab states.

US Threat Perceptions

Promotion of Democracy

With the changes that the Middle East is currently undergoing, the evolution of extremist terror groups and the unfolding of civil wars, the US can ill afford losing a key ally such as Egypt. The US’s main threat perceptions towards Egypt largely concern its potential for destabilization and the effect this break down could have on the region and Israel. The US is well aware that if the continued chaos in countries such as Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Libya were to reach Egypt, it would provide a security concern on three different levels. Militant Islamists would gain a strong foothold in the country. Additionally, if terrorist activity were to be expanded to include the targeting of ports and ships it would risk jeopardizing the free flow of goods through the Suez Canal-- a key gateway to international trade, and a primary component of the security agreement between Egypt and Israel. Indubitably, ensuring stability in Egypt is key for the US in ensuring stability in the greater Middle East region. Under the guidelines/matrix provided in our methodology, this threat is considered a security concern for the United States. Its timeframe would fall under short-term, and the level of threat is between medium and high.
The US had previously supported Mubarak while turning a blind eye to the human rights violations committed by his regime. Eventually, the regime succumbed to popular protests and was removed in 2011. Repeating the same mistake after the events of 2011 would severely threaten US interests on multiple levels. Most simply, this faux pas would undermine US credibility throughout the region. Furthermore, aligning with authoritarian regimes comes at the expense of other security interests. Currently the US faces the similar dilemma of whether to continue turning a blind eye to human rights abuses, and a lack of democratic transition, in support of what appears to be another military regime. There is a real threat that continued suppression of Muslim Brotherhood supporters, in addition to human rights violations and a lack of political inclusiveness could eventually result in increased instability in Egypt. Over time, this long-term instability has the potential of destabilizing Egyptian-Israeli relations via creation of divisions between Egyptian civilians and the military. Lastly, the purge of Muslim Brotherhood supporters by the Egyptian military carries the risk of further isolating and instigating regional groups affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood and other regional Islamic political parties, who may view the US support of the Egyptian military as the cause of their demise and isolation. Under the guidelines/matrix provided in our methodology, this threat is considered a political concern for the United States. Its timeframe would fall under long-term, and the level of threat is medium.

**Proliferation of Extremist Groups**

Rather than producing a positive political transfer towards democracy, the Arab uprisings produced more failed states that are no longer able to control their own territory. Borders have become ever more porous in the Middle East, and already fragile security systems continue to deteriorate in multiple states. This has created an ideal environment for groups such as Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, Al-Nusra, Abdullah Azzam Brigades, ISIS, Fatah al-Islam, Hezbollah, and Hamas to flex their muscles and ponder their growing freedom. Each of these groups has the potential to destabilize the countries they operate in, in addition to targeting local US interests, such as US embassies, bases, and personnel.

Another potential threat that the US faces is the possibility of the Middle East becoming the accepted safe haven for Islamic terrorists, militants and jihadists, who are determined to continue the regional turmoil and instability. If these groups are able to secure
a foothold in the region, this threat could eventually culminate in global terrorism, affecting Western nations directly.

The US is split over how to assess the threat posed by ISIS and other groups to homeland security. Attorney General Eric Holder said, “We are seeing, I would say, an alarming rise in the number of American and European Union nationals who have been going to Syria to help extremist groups.”266 The arrest of three Brooklyn men who had plans to join ISIS and launch their own attacks in the United States confirmed the FBI’s fear of lone wolf attacks--“those who operate without direction from abroad and without help from a terrorist organization or cell.”267

Also important is the fact that these non-state extremist groups pose a threat to the global economy, via the destabilization and disruption of global oil markets and those reserves in the Middle East that provide the bulk of the global supply. With the experience of the organized 1973 oil embargo very clear in most Western nation’s minds, the thought of an unorganized disruption in the oil production and flow of oil through the Middle East is even more alarming. The US must be able to ensure the free unhindered passage of oil throughout the region, not just due to the global economic dependency, but also due to the prospects of using oil production and sale funds to assist in reestablishing stability and order in nations such as Iraq, Libya, and Syria.

In a contrasting assessment, Elgindy argues that “ISIS mostly just threatens our partners in the region. It is a real threat to them before it is a threat to us. It threatens our interests by harming our allies.”268 ISIS and other extremist groups have been focusing mostly on nearby targets, but there is still a division of interests within these organizations. There are those who still concentrate on attacking the US, or recruiting Westerners to carry out these attacks, but there are also those who prefer to attack the West through embassy bombings, or targeting military bases or even tourist hotspots. Lastly, as Elgindy explains, many groups are concerned primarily with local regimes and other Muslims. ISIS falls in this last camp, concentrating on establishing a caliphate within Syria and Iraq. Under the guidelines/matrix provided in our methodology, this threat is considered a security concern.

266 Published Thursday, February 05, 2015 / The Five With Kimberly Guilfoyle, Bob Beckel, Eric Bolling, Dana Perino, Greg Gutfeld, Shepard Smith, ”The Five,” February 5, 2015.
268 Interview with Khaled Elgindy March 27 2015.
for the United States. Its timeframe would fall under imminent, and the level of threat is extreme.

**US Options**

The US has a number of options it can undertake with respect to Egypt and the broader regional turmoil, based on its interests and threat perceptions.

Concerning the regional turmoil, the US could look into further supporting and aiding the proposed Joint Arab Military Force. With the US looking to decrease its military footprint in the region, an indigenous, united military organization presents the United States with the ability of doing just that, whilst protecting its main interests. The US should covertly back the Joint Arab Military Force in order not to seem to be taking sides in inter-Arab affairs, and act as a consultant to the organization, rather than a sponsor.

An additional problem for the US is that despite Iran’s ostensibly helpful posture in combating ISIS, the Iranian regime continues to support President Assad, and shuttle Shiite militants into Syria and other terror hotspots. So long as the US does not counter Iran’s unchecked militant deployment, critics charge that the US is acquiescing to Iranian regional hegemony. Hezbollah, considered a terrorist organization by the US, has been playing a central role in the anti-ISIS crusade as a result of Iranian support. US policy therefore must adjust for both anti-Sunni and anti-Shiite terrorism. Moreover, precautions should be taken so that an Iranian nuclear agreement does not stymie US counterterrorism efforts.

Another option for the US proposed by Shadi Hamid and Peter Mandaville would be to sponsor a Multilateral Endowment for Reform (MER), which would help provide “contours of a new framework to incentivize reform and could reshape the US basic relationship in the Middle East.”269 This fund, whose dispersals of economic aid would depend on explicit democratic reforms, would rely on the entire international community, removing perceptions that the US hopes to engineer political outcomes. However, this initiative is a very long-term project, and it does not help in bringing to an end the immediate conflicts in countries such as Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Iraq.

Therefore, the US cannot avoid its global responsibilities in maintaining order. Jabhat al-Nusra undermines the initial goals of the Syrian protestors, but it currently represents

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the most potent threat to the Assad regime. The biggest fear of the US has already been confirmed: the most radical opposition groups are the largest recipients of outside arms and resources. To ensure stability, the US should find a way to identify and support the moderate opposition in Syria by working with global and regional partners in order to find an acceptable alternative to the Assad regime.

Lastly, the US should work multilaterally to increase anti-money laundering efforts and establish a roadblock on ISIS and Salafi suppliers. Cutting off supplies and starving them of cash-flow will handicap extremists groups across the region more than any military operation. Money is their source of growth, and depriving them of these funds is the silver bullet in protecting US security interests.

**Israeli Perspective**

Compared to most nations, Israel’s security had the most at stake as Arab nations descended into varying states of chaos. However, unlike their US and European counterparts, Israeli officials preferred to adopt a “wait and see” tactic as they evaluated the developing regional events of 2011. Government ministries, diplomats, and officers were ordered to adopt a strategic silence concerning opposing political and military forces in Arab states.  

Israeli officials understood that the ongoing revolutionary waves occurring in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Syria, and Yemen, were each distinctly different, and refrained from generalizations. Accordingly, Israeli military officials in the IDF officially rejected the term Arab Spring, considering it misleading, and adopted the phrase “regional upheaval” to describe the events.

Israeli and US evaluations of regional instability diverged most prominently over prospects of democracy in the Middle East, and their views about militant organizations. Israeli officials, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, were quick in warning that events unfolding in Cairo in 2011 had an uncanny resemblance to events that occurred in Tehran in 1979, highlighting the danger of instability and political Islam to the region. In his address to the United Nations General Assembly in 2014, Prime Minister Benjamin

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Netanyahu compared militant Islamists to a cancer, adding that ISIS and Hamas are “branches of the same poisonous tree.”

Israel viewed the 2011 events in Egypt, in particular, with skepticism and trepidation. For three decades, Mubarak's Egypt was the anchor of Israel's regional security. Since his removal from power, the lawless Sinai has been the source of multiple rocket and terror attacks against both Israel and Egypt. Moreover, a principal source of gas for Israel was erased as Egypt backtracked on its gas contract. However, since the removal of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the election of President Abdel Fatah El Sisi, Egyptian-Israeli security relations have considerably improved. Israel, aware that any military action on its part in the Sinai could potentially undermine the peace treaty, has been working closely with the Egyptian military. The Israeli government has lobbied its American counterparts to urge Egyptian officials to fully assert their sovereignty in the Sinai. Israel has also acquiesced in the deployment by Egypt of additional troops in the Sinai, and Israel and Egypt have intensified their intelligence relations. This has resulted in an unprecedented strengthening in strategic security cooperation between the two states. Indeed, acquiescence in enhanced troop deployment to the Sinai is Israel's clearest indication of support for an Arab regime since the 2011 uprisings began.

Concerning the deteriorating war in Syria, while it hasn't exposed Israel to violence yet, it can become a crippling security problem for the Israelis. Bashar al-Assad, while never a friend to Israel, has never breached the category of enemy either. Although Israel has taken a cautious rhetorical posture in the civil war, its military has been surreptitiously attacking military targets involved in transporting missiles to Hezbollah in Lebanon. On another level, Israeli facilities have been supplying humanitarian aid and medical treatment to injured rebels. These ostensibly contradictory trends reveal that Israel has not established a firm policy position on the four-year war.

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272 "Transcript of Benjamin Netanyahu's address to the 2014 UN General Assembly." Haaretz. 29 Sep. 2014. 11 Apr. 2015.
274 Berti, Benedetta “Israel and the Arab Spring: Understanding Attitudes and Responses to the New Middle East” Foreign Policy Research Institute. March, 2013.
Israeli Interests

*Promotion of Democracy*

Among the many threats facing Israel after the Arab revolutions, the Egyptian revolution was deemed the most perilous, threatening Israeli security and foreign policy interests. Initial Israeli fears pertained to Mubarak’s successor, and whether he would abide by the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. Having previously fought Egypt in wars in 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973, the Israeli government seriously feared that its biggest military foe in the region could potentially break a three-decade peace settlement.

The promotion of democracy and the prospects of a political transition in Egypt are not high on Israel’s list of priorities. Israeli officials are more interested in ensuring that there is a stable governing authority in Cairo that is both able to exercise its authority over Egyptian territory, and to maintain the peace agreement between the two states. Although Israeli officials are not against a democratic transition in Egypt, their main concern is ensuring that those in power perpetuate friendly relations. While the Muslim Brotherhood never broke the peace accord, most Israeli officials were doubtful about their commitment to the peace agreement. Therefore, while Sisi’s ascent to power was not democratic, Israeli officials feel that with President Sisi in power, Egyptian-Israeli security concerns in the Sinai and with respect to Hamas’s status in the Gaza Strip are synchronized.

Second, the Israeli government was worried that continued chaos in Egypt could further strengthen Hamas in the Gaza Strip. With the Egyptian military preoccupied with the capital’s unrest, Palestinian militants could have seized upon a weakened border with Egypt, increasing the number of illegal tunnels and creating more opportunity to smuggle arms and ammunitions into Gaza.

A third Israel concern about Egypt was its political orientation towards the Iranian regime. Throughout his thirty years in power, Mubarak had held a strong anti-Iranian position, which suited Israel quite well. However during the short-lived rule of the Muslim Brotherhood, Egyptian-Iranian relations seemed to be moving toward normalization, and Israeli officials feared what this development might mean for Egyptian-Israeli relations.

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277 "Israel, Egypt security cooperation multiplied under Sisi." Middle East Monitor. 6 Mar. 2015. 11 Apr. 2015.
**Proliferation of Extremist Groups**

Israeli regional interests focus mainly on its security and the protection of its borders. Chief among them is the stability of the Sinai, preventing the transfer of high quality weapons from Iran to Syria and Hezbollah, and ensuring that Israeli sovereignty is not threatened. While the Egyptians are the primary caretakers in the Sinai, Israel has deployed substantial resources to support the Egyptian military in order to quell terrorists' behavior, thwart further rocket attacks, and to eradicate illegal tunnels—the cardinal passageway for arms smugglers and assailants in the Gaza Strip.

Concerning Syria, Israel has continued to play a tense signaling game with the Assad regime, and has reportedly struck Syrian military assets while also reminding the Assad regime that if attacked, Israel will act with the intent of overthrowing the regime. The emergence of militant non-state actors, challenging the Syrian Army, has created a security vacuum, presenting Israel with a new threat. As the popular platitude suggests, Israel has maintained the position that “the devil we know is better than chaos.” The question therefore becomes: at what point do they believe that Syria has descended into chaos?

In particular, the evolving presence of ISIS within Syria has proven to be a magnet for extremists. Until now, ISIS has comprised only a threat to regional order, but the uncovering of ISIS sleeper cells in the West Bank would constitute a direct threat to Israel. Elgindy explains that the more daring ISIS becomes, the more likely the group is to add the liberation of Jerusalem to its objectives. Israeli analysts concur with Elgindy's assessment, asserting that jihadi elements would be strengthened by declining order in the Middle East. At present, Israel’s largest concern is for lone wolf attacks and Jihadi recruitment efforts in Israel. Israel’s intelligence services have foiled attempts by Israeli-Arabs and Palestinians to join ISIS and other groups in Syria, but still they are most concerned about Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria, and the threat they can level at Israel.

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**Israeli Threat Perceptions**


279 Interview with Khaled Elgindy March 27 2015.
Israel's main security concerns and threat perceptions therefore focus on three central issues: stabilization in Egypt and the Sinai, the transfer of Iranian weapons to the Syrian regime and Hezbollah, and the protection of Israeli territory and sovereignty.

Promotion of Democracy

As highlighted above, Israeli intentions towards Egypt are oriented more around security rather than political interests. Israel is less concerned about the promotion of democracy in Egypt than the promotion of security and stability, and thus far the Egyptian military is the only entity capable of safeguarding these interests. Israel has been working and intends to continue to work with the Egyptian military to ensure the security of its western border, and to stamp out the extremist threat in Sinai. Israel, like Egypt, considers the Gaza Strip a national security threat due to the advance of hundreds of Islamist militants and weapons between Gaza and Sinai through underground tunnels.

While the US continues to pressure Egypt into greater democratic inclusion, Israel has remained skeptical about the possibility of a democratic transition in Egypt, fearing it may contribute to the rise of political Islam. As seen under the authority of Morsi, an Islamist-governed Egypt would empower extremist groups such as Hamas, thereby jeopardizing Israeli security.

According to Jeremy Sharp, “while Israel’s relationship with Egypt’s military is not without challenges, both sides maintain regular dialogue on defense and intelligence issues.” Additionally, with the Egyptian military exerting its authority over the Sinai, the possibility of restoring energy deals suspended under Morsi, and including gas transfers in the commodity package, has increased. In summarizing this threat and placing it under the guidelines/matrix provided in our methodology, this threat is considered a security concern for Israel. Its timeframe would fall under short-term, and the level of threat is medium.

Proliferation of Extremist Groups

From an Israeli perspective, the most serious threat that could emerge from regional upheaval is the emergence of a well-coordinated indigenous Salafist jihadist group, stretching from the Sinai, through Jordan, into Syria, and eventually into Lebanon. Groups such as Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, Al-Nusra, Abdullah Azzam Brigades, ISIS, Fatah al-Islam,

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Hezbollah, and Hamas, could potentially pose a threat to Israel if they were to cohesively coordinate and instigate Israeli involvement by provoking an attack, to which Israel may be compelled to respond. Israel views the transfer of high quality weapons and ammunitions from Iran to both the Assad regime and to Hezbollah as a security threat that could eventually result in an attack on Israel. Additionally, Israeli officials understand that spillage of negative externalities into Israeli territory from ongoing conflicts in Syria, Lebanon, and the Sinai poses a severe security threat; This threat would not only risk the domestic security of Israel, but it would also directly affect its relationship with neighboring Arab countries, thus possibly drawing Israel into a regional conflict it would rather avoid.

Thus far Israel has exercised restraint and used an approach of balancing non-involvement with deterrence. However, if an (unidentified) red line were to be crossed, and Israeli interests were put directly at risk, Israel would feel compelled to respond. Under the guidelines/matrix provided in our methodology, this threat is considered a security concern for Israel. Its timeframe would fall under imminent, and the level of threat is extreme.

It is interesting to note that the US and Israel diverge concerning the conflation of all Islamist groups. While the US agrees with Israel that militant groups and organizations across the Middle East are a regional threat, the US tends to approach each militant Islamist organization differently. Israel on the other hand views militant Islamists as part of the same “poisonous tree,” thus increasing the level of threat these organizations pose and the response Israel employs in combating them.

**Options for Israel**

The number of options available to Israel with respect to Egypt and the regional upheavals, and based on its interests and threat perceptions, are more limited and restrained than its posture toward the West Bank and Gaza or Iran’s nuclear capabilities.

Israeli officials and lobbyists in Washington could continue to pressure the US to provide further support to the Egyptian military through military and economic aid in order to ensure stability in Egypt and support their fight against extremist militants in the Sinai. This option would not only provide Israel with increased security on its border with Egypt,

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but could help realign US and Israeli interests in the region, despite other divergences in regional interests.

Additionally, the regional upheavals have prompted Israel to strengthen its diplomatic ties with actors beyond the Middle East. Until the Arab uprisings of 2011, Israel could usually count intermittently on Egypt, Turkey, or Iran (before the 1979 revolution) for tactical support. However, Israeli-Turkish relations have significantly declined following the election of the AKP in 2002, exemplified in the Gaza Flotilla Raid in 2010. Israeli-Iranian relations since the Iran-contra affair have been virtually nonexistent, and the possibility of a nuclearized Iran makes it unlikely that relations between the two will improve. One of the realizations of the Arab uprisings was that authoritarian Arab regimes were unstable and unpredictable, and Israel should be wary of the unpredictability of domestic Egyptian political developments. Therefore, Israel could begin to form alliances in the peripheries of the Middle East. States such as Ethiopia, Cyprus, Greece, South Sudan, and Azerbaijan, may prove to be essential allies in breaking Israel away from regional isolation, and also help to gain further international support.

A third option for Israel in response to security threats is to continue to remain silent/defensive, while carrying out minimal defensive attacks against those that threaten Israel’s sovereignty. According to Amichai Megnan, “since mid-2011, the Israeli Air Force and navy have carried out approximately a dozen covert strikes on weapons convoys and depots.” Although this option has thus far enabled Israel to avoid entanglement and spillover from the regional conflicts, it is not a long-term plan that will help Israel achieve security.

A final option for Israel would entail overt or covert military options to eliminate perceived immediate threats to Israeli security. This option would lead to increased Israeli involvement in regional affairs, through military operations against non-state militants in the Sinai, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, the West Bank, and Gaza. This option would risk escalating regional hostilities towards Israel, and even jeopardize key peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan.

**Summary**

Given the events of the past five years, it is difficult for anyone to predict what the future orientation of the Middle East will look like. On a daily basis, new developments and crises transpire with potential resounding effects internationally, resulting in the reorientation and recalibration of many government policies and interests.
However, what is clear is that the previous five years have not altered much in terms of ongoing American, Israeli, and Egyptian interests concerning the regional situation. US and Israeli interests remain closely intertwined concerning the security of Israel, regardless of disputes between the current administrations. Israeli security and US assistance militarily and economically have not been subject to significant debate. The US firmly believes in the protection of Israeli territory and its sovereignty. Where US and Israeli interests diverged the most concerning the regional turmoil, was in regards to the prospects of democracy in the region, and Israeli displeasure in the manner that the US quickly let go of a close ally in Mubarak who had previously helped protect Israeli interests. An additional divergence is how both the US and Israel view different militant Islamist organizations throughout the Middle East. While Israel tends to view all these extremists groups as united in wishing for the destruction of Israel and creation of an Islamic state, the US does not conflate these extremist groups to the same extent.

While there are divergences, there are also convergences, and the United States and Israel do agree on two major issues. They agree on an enduring commitment to Israeli sovereignty and territorial integrity (within the 1967 borders). The US will continue to protect and supply Israel militarily regardless of any transformations in the Middle East. Additionally, both countries agree upon the importance of a stable Egypt as a strategic regional ally, whose solidarity with both the US and Israel is vital in policing the Sinai and combating militant Islamists regionally.

Nevertheless, internal Arab political developments never constituted a core Israeli interest. US ambivalence toward authoritarian regimes in the region was accentuated as transitions to democracy after the Arab Spring uprisings faltered, presenting a conundrum as Americans ponder how to uphold core political beliefs. Overall, therefore, divergences on responses to the Arab insurrections are relatively small, and convergences plenty. Although regional instability poses important threats to both countries’ national security interests, differentiated responses are unlikely to become a defining feature of the US-Israel security relationship.

REFERENCES


Conclusion
This report has captured the ambivalence inherent in the US-Israel security relationship. Some analysts exaggerate ongoing frictions, asserting that the partnership has passed a point of no return and will inevitably weaken. Others inflate the closeness, declaring that Israel has a blank check to US funds and weapons arsenal, and that American diplomatic support provides Israel an unwavering shield from international criticism. Our report has shown, however, that the reality lies somewhere in between these two extremes. The mutual interests forming the basis of the US-Israel security partnership have not precluded moments of deep tension, and the continued strength of the relationship depends on the willingness of both to build on convergences and manage divergences in threat perceptions.

Today, there are three primary sources of friction in the US-Israel security relationship. The unresolved status of the West Bank and Gaza, Iran’s nuclear development, and the Arab insurrections are all complex and multidimensional issues with significant regional ramifications. Situated in different neighborhoods and with a vast disparity in power, the US and Israel naturally define and approach these regional security challenges in distinct ways.

There is no consensus among analysts about how security should be defined. As we discussed the US-Israel relationship with regard to these three challenges, our team employed a broad conception of security, understanding that a threat can include issues ranging from identity to bodily harm. We broke down the concept of a threat into three distinct derivatives: demographic, political and physical. We assessed these threats in terms of timeframe (imminent, short-term or long-term) and likelihood (low, medium, or high) in order to systematically consider how the US and Israel perceive them.

In concluding this report, we wish to offer some comparative insights on the salience of the three areas of friction in shaping the quality of US-Israel security relations. To begin with, the chapter on the West Bank and Gaza delineated physical and political threats towards the US as a negative externality derived from engagement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. US political interests in the Middle East have been threatened because Middle Eastern countries view US foreign policy through the frame of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in which the US is often perceived as biased towards Israel. Because this issue often fuels extremism, the US faces an imminent physical threat as well. A possible suspension in security cooperation by the PA or the potential collapse of the Abbas regime in the West Bank, which could have a spillover effect in
Jordan and cause a power struggle between Fatah and Hamas, is considered a political and physical threat for both the US and Israel, but its likelihood in occurrence is low.

In addition to the imminent, high, and physical security threats Israel faces from acts of terrorism, many Israelis are also concerned with the long-term, high, demographic threat to Israel as a Jewish state posed by the unresolved status of the West Bank and Gaza. Tensions often arise between the US and Israel over Israeli policies addressing these threats, be it military ground operations or an expansionist settlement policy. However, because the implications of the Palestinian issue are much higher for Israel, and the issue is of relatively low priority for the US when compared to other current regional challenges, tensions over these issues are less likely to lead to a serious fallout.

Second, the Iranian issue signifies the most pronounced divergence in Israeli-US threat evaluations. According to Israelis, the most severe threat Iran levies over Israel is one of nuclear annihilation. This threat is medium or long-term, depending on the outcome of current negotiations, but Israelis believe it has real potential for occurrence. The US, however, has insisted that Iran’s most fundamental threat against Israel is the security and political threat of Iran gaining increased regional influence through proxy states and non-state actors. Most conspicuous is Hezbollah’s high profile activism in Lebanon and Syria, which brings Iran’s armed influence close to Israel’s borders. The threat of Iran’s engagement in regional conflicts has a high likelihood of occurring in the near future. While the US and Israel both agree this is a potentially destabilizing threat, Israel still maintains that nuclear annihilation is a more pressing concern. The high priority that both Israel and the US attribute to the Iranian issue tends to amplify these tensions.

Third, with respect to the implications of Arab insurrections and the waning hope that democracy will emerge in the region, there has been less divergence in American and Israeli assessments. In Egypt, where the US chose to turn a blind eye towards a military coup at the expense of a democratically elected regime, the Muslim Brotherhood and other organizations have been suppressed and silenced, and human rights abuses have become the norm. The threat to US credibility and democratic desires in the region, compounded by the rise of extremism, is considered a long-term political concern with a medium level of threat. Israel, however, is more concerned about the potential rise of political Islam as a consequence of democratic elections in
Egypt, and the potential for growing chaos in the Sinai. Therefore, this threat is physical rather than political, and short-term instead of long.

An additional threat born from the Arab uprisings and nurtured in a region ripe with unrest is the threat of religious extremism. This threat is more immediate for Israel than for the US—given that the Golan Heights borders Syria, and extremists can be found among the populations in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. However both countries concur that the danger of the Middle East becoming a cradle for terrorism, and its corollary, Western recruitment and attacks, is an imminent and high physical threat. Addressing the situation in the region is a high priority for both Israel and the US, but frictions over the divergences in their approaches to this challenge have been more limited.

Despite divergences in interests and threat perceptions, opportunities for security cooperation remain for all these issues. For the West Bank and Gaza, redefining US policies for the training of PA security forces would allow the US to help recalibrate dynamics on the ground and address concrete concerns of both parties. By stressing implementation of previously concluded Palestinian-Israel agreements, but refraining from resuming negotiations until the climate is suitable, the US can maintain its role and rebuild its credibility with the parties and in the region. At the same time, continuing to condemn Israeli settlement expansion and proposing American parameters for future talks would clearly communicate US principles and expectations for the conflict and peace process.

Regarding the Iranian threat, it is critical for the US to continue to pursue current negotiations while vigorously reassuring Israel of the value of their partnership. The US must receive a guarantee from Israel to refrain from engaging in a military operation against Iran until they have a better understanding of what the final agreement would entail. Israel’s options for curtailing the Iranian threat are more limited. Currently, we do not consider a military strike to be a viable option for Israel, whose best hope in the present climate is to continue to trust the United States.

The most synchronized recommendations for the US and Israel are the options available for handling the challenges born from the Arab uprisings. The US should support the proposed Joint Arab Military Force, which would simultaneously benefit US and Israeli security. The US must also find an avenue for supporting moderate opponents of the Assad regime in Syria. Lastly, the US and Israel should work together in conjunction with other states on anti-money
laundering efforts. Israel has a sophisticated and deep intelligence network, and joint cooperation in finding and liquidating terror finances is an ideal project for joint US-Israeli engagement.

One sensitive issue for both partners is the degree to which broader US interests in the Middle East are negatively affected by its friendship with Israel. One clear historical example of this phenomenon is the way in which the Nixon administration’s decision to air lift supplies to Israel during the 1973 war with Egypt and Syria led to serious repercussions for the US. The targeting of the US in the Arab oil embargo pursuant to the war was costly for the US economy, and ceasefire violations at the end of the war precipitated a tense confrontation with the Soviet Union. In recent years, as Israel’s international isolation has increased, the costs of this relationship are measured less in dollars than in political capital. Israeli actions in Palestine have exposed the US to criticism, not only in the region but from European allies as well. Israeli apparent efforts to drive a wedge between the US executive and legislative branches during the pursuit of a multilateral diplomatic agreement with Iran on its nuclear program risks damaging the US’s credibility as a negotiating partner.

Aware of these costs to the US and that countering its international isolation requires more than American friendship, Israel has worked to cultivate relations with other nations as well. For example, for the last few decades Israel has been establishing strong security ties and economic relations with China. Nevertheless, Israeli leaders realize that China cannot be counted on for diplomatic or military support when the chips are down, and that there is no substitute for the reliable partnership with the US.

Depending on a range of regional contingencies, the interests and threat perceptions of the US and Israel may further diverge or realign more closely. We predict that the security partnership will remain a key feature of US foreign policy in the near future because there remain considerable mutual benefits. Our recommendations have shown that though frictions are likely to persist, there are ways to manage them and build on common goals. This conclusion is supported by the historical track record of the US and Israel in overcoming policy disagreements while maintaining close security cooperation. However, if they are indeed to preserve the essence of their “special relationship,” both parties will have to accommodate each other’s needs and priorities, and this will not happen automatically. Like any relationship, the future of the US-Israeli partnership will be determined by the choices made by both, and in a region littered with surprises, anything is possible.
## Appendix I: Interviews

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<td>Shlomo Brom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vice Admiral Paul Bushong</td>
<td>Former US security coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority</td>
<td>US Government (Navy and State Department)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charles Dunne</td>
<td>Director of Middle East and North Africa programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Khaled Elgindy</td>
<td>Fellow</td>
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<td>Charles Freilich</td>
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<td>Harvard Kennedy School</td>
<td>17 April 2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ilan Goldenberg</td>
<td>Senior Fellow</td>
<td>Center for a New American Security</td>
<td>25 March 2015; 8 April 2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>David Makovsky</td>
<td>Ziegler Distinguished Fellow</td>
<td>Washington Institute for Near East Policy</td>
<td>26 March 2015</td>
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<td>Aaron David Miller</td>
<td>Distinguished Scholar</td>
<td>Wilson Center</td>
<td>6 April 2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richard Nephew</td>
<td>Program Director</td>
<td>Columbia University, Center on Global Energy Policy</td>
<td>12 March 2015</td>
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<td>David Ottoway</td>
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<td>Wilson Center</td>
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<td>Gideon Rose</td>
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<td>Council on Foreign Relations</td>
<td>6 February 2015</td>
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<td>Alon Sachar</td>
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<td>US State Department</td>
<td>1 April 2015</td>
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<td>Natan Sachs</td>
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<td>Eric Trager</td>
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<td>Washington Institute</td>
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<td>Gary Sick</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>Columbia University</td>
<td>15 March 2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alex Vatanka</td>
<td>Fellow</td>
<td>Middle East Institute</td>
<td>11 February 2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>James Zanotti</td>
<td>Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs</td>
<td>Congressional Research Service</td>
<td>23 April 2015</td>
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<td>US Government</td>
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Appendix II: Composite References

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