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## THE STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE PEACE PROCESS FOR ISRAEL

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**The Basic Imbalance Will Continue / Judea, Samaria, and Jordan / Syria and the Golan Heights / The Long-Range Strategic Threat / Continued Reliance on the United States / Arms Control and Regional Security**

### **The Basic Imbalance Will Continue**

While the peace process, and the potential for agreements and territorial withdrawal from Judea and Samaria as well as from the Golan Heights, could lower the prospects for major warfare in the region, the basic asymmetries and strategic imbalances that have always endangered Israel will continue, and may well be exacerbated.

As a result, Israeli military strategy, acquisitions, and deployments will have to respond accordingly. The first stage, involving redeployment and withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and Jericho, and the transfer of authority to the Palestinians, is likely to have a relatively limited strategic effect. (In contrast, the threat of terrorism is likely to increase, but terror is not a strategic military threat to Israeli survival.) Later stages, which, according to the Declaration of Principles negotiated between Israel and the PLO (the "Oslo Agreement"), will include the redeployment and withdrawal of the IDF from most of Judea and Samaria, and new arrangements with Jordan, will have much greater impact on Israeli security and strategy. If negotiations with

Syria lead to an agreement on the Golan Heights, Israel will need to adjust its doctrine and deployments accordingly.

In addition, the process will be affected by the reactions of the wider Arab and Islamic world, extending from Algeria to Iraq and Iran. If these states become active participants in regional arrangements to increase common security and stability, Israel can reduce the resources devoted to longer range strategic requirements. On the other hand, if the radical states such as Iran, Iraq, and Libya reject the agreements and continue to threaten military action against Israel, the importance of ties with the United States, and the emphasis on strategic deterrence and defense, will increase.

### **Judea, Samaria, and Jordan**

The strategic impact of the agreements with respect to Judea and Samaria depends on two factors: 1) demilitarization of areas handed over to the Palestinians; and 2) the degree to which the IDF maintains control over the airspace, the central mountain ranges, the Jordan Valley, and the east-

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west roads that connect the heights to the desert and central Israel. The major threat of a large-scale conventional attack continues to be from the east. In the long term, Israeli planners continue to be concerned that a resurgent Iraq, joined by Jordan under a fundamentalist Islamic regime, Syria, and even Iran, which has begun to repair relations with Iraq and other Arab states, could launch a combined attack, threatening the survival of the Jewish state. At the narrow points outside Tel Aviv, pre-1967 Israel is only 15 kilometers wide, and defense of these borders is impossible. However, by maintaining an early warning and long-range intelligence capability and military control along the Jordan River, the IDF can minimize degradation of its capability to respond to large-scale ground attacks.

Whatever the details of the political settlement, Israel will continue to rely on offensive air power to destroy large-scale tank and artillery concentrations well before they reach the Jordan River. Thus, while ground forces may be reduced, the Israeli air force can be expected to seek increased capabilities, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Emphasis on ground attack helicopters such as the Apache for use against tank and artillery columns will also grow.

Unless the areas controlled by the Palestinians in Judea and Samaria are demilitarized, IDF air and ground operations in response to a large-scale attack could be blocked and harassed. Anti-aircraft systems operated by Palestinian forces in this territory could significantly hamper Israeli air force operations. Small units from Palestinian ground forces could also make it difficult to move tanks and artillery from Israel through the desert and to the Jordan River. Assuming that the Israeli demand for demilitarization is accepted in the formal agreements, enforcement and verification will still pose significant problems. Even with control of the borders, the IDF will probably have to assume that the Palestinians will be able to obtain large numbers of small, hand-held, surface-to-air anti-aircraft missiles (SAMs), as well as anti-tank weapons, land mines and small weapons.

Withdrawal from large areas of Judea and Samaria will also have significant indirect costs, resulting from the loss of land for bases, weapons storage and forward mobilization centers, and space for holding large-scale training exercises. Israel is a very small state, with little space for additional military facilities. The IDF will be hard pressed to relocate these bases within the pre-1967 borders, and preliminary estimates suggest that this aspect alone will cost hundreds of millions of dollars. Over the past decade, following the peace

treaty with Egypt, Israel has already had to absorb the bases that were located in the Sinai, and further relocation may force Israel to reduce the number of facilities and the scope of exercises.

### Syria and the Golan Heights

The Golan Heights dominate both northern Israel and the Damascus plain, and control of this area is of central strategic importance. In the opening hours of the 1973 war, Syrian forces succeeded in sweeping down the Heights, and, in the absence of the counterattack from Israeli reserve forces, would have been able to advance across northern Israel. Damascus is 40 kilometers from the Israeli front lines, and the implicit threat to the Syrian capital has contributed to stability and caution. Withdrawal from the Golan and the loss of this strategic advantage could lead to instability and renewed military challenges from Damascus.

Here, as in the case of Judea and Samaria, the strategic impact on Israel will depend on the details of any agreement. A number of alternatives have been proposed to replace Israeli forces on the Golan. From the Israeli perspective, demilitarization of this area alone is insufficient to protect against a large-scale attack. The Syrian military has acquired 1,400 main battle tanks in the past two years, for a total of 4,800 (1,000 more than the Israeli total). A major Syrian ground attack staged from just outside the demilitarized Golan Heights would be able to reach Israeli territory in a few hours, and with almost no warning time. An expanded demilitarized zone, beyond the Golan itself, would include Damascus. However, this would leave the Assad regime unprotected from internal threats and is considered to be unacceptable to Syria.

Alternatively, the United States has proposed the stationing of external forces on the Golan as a barrier to a Syrian attack. One option would involve one to two combat-ready divisions of American or American-led forces plus combat aircraft. Given the questions of long-term commitment and credibility of this foreign force, however, Israel may not be willing to stake its security on such a force. It is also doubtful as to whether the U.S. even has such a large force available to spare for permanent duty on the Golan.

A third alternative would involve major reductions in standing Syrian forces in the area. The Syrian standing army is twice as large as Israel's, and a surprise attack, based on forces in place, and supported by combat aircraft and surface-to-surface missiles (SSMs) with chemical warheads, could block Israeli reserve mobilization. This danger could be reduced through a major reduction in the size of the Syrian

forces based in proximity to Israel. The regime would be allowed to maintain two divisions in the Damascus area for internal purposes, with some armor, but would not require T-72 tanks for this purpose.

The Golan also provides Israel with important early warning and intelligence facilities, and these will have to be replaced if Israel withdraws. One option provides for continued operation of these facilities under American or multilateral control, as in the case of the Sinai stations during the period of the interim agreements with Egypt. To supplement these stations, Israel might also deploy its own high-altitude reconnaissance platforms.

Any Israeli withdrawal from the Golan is also linked to a clear end to the conflict with Syria, marked by a formal peace treaty and the establishment of a network of interdependent and cooperative relationships. Specific confidence and security-building measures (CSBMs) would include crisis management mechanisms, frequent meetings between military commanders, pre-notification and observation of military exercises, and other CSBMs based on the model offered by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). In addition, verifiable ceilings on the acquisition of new weapons systems, both conventional and unconventional, are under discussion. This model has been successful in the case of Egypt, and the peace has been preserved for over 15 years, despite the assassination of Sadat and periodic tensions. Egypt has honored the terms of the treaty, including demilitarization of the Sinai, and officers from both countries meet and exchange information in the context of CSBMs. Similar measures with respect to Syria will balance the costs of withdrawal from the Golan and could improve Israel's strategic situation significantly.

### **The Long-Range Strategic Threat**

The long-range missiles and chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons that are being acquired or sought by many countries are the major and fastest growing strategic threat to Israel. Libya, Syria, and Iran have significant stockpiles of chemical weapons, and all three have or are acquiring long-range ballistic missiles capable of reaching targets in Israel. With North Korean assistance, Iran and Syria have acquired missiles capable of reaching targets at distances of 1,000 kilometers. The Iraqi nuclear, missile, and chemical weapons programs can be expected to resume immediately after the international sanctions are lifted.

In the meantime, Iran is accelerating its efforts to acquire nuclear weapons, and, unless forced to stop, is expected to become a nuclear power by the year

2000. The government in Teheran has actively opposed the peace process and supported Hizbollah guerrillas operating out of Lebanon against Israel, as well as the Hamas terrorists.

Thus, regional stability and Israeli security depend on removing or substantially reducing the threat posed by these states and their unconventional weapons. However, here the impact of the peace process is weakest. Iran, Iraq, and Libya have refused to participate in the negotiations and have denounced the Arab states and Palestinians who have agreed to recognize and deal with Israel. The military government in Algeria has agreed to participate in the multilateral negotiations, including the workshops on arms control and regional security, but work on the nuclear program continues, and is likely to fall into the hands of Islamic fundamentalists who are challenging the military for control.

Unless Iran, Iraq, and Libya are brought into the negotiations, or their nuclear programs (along with Algeria's) are halted, the strategic threat to Israel from these countries will continue to grow. Without the inclusion of these states, regional arms limitation efforts aimed at slowing or stopping the proliferation of missiles and weapons of mass destruction will not get off the ground. Israeli leaders have said that they expect the international community, led by the United States, to block these threats before weapons are produced, but the Iraqi precedent does not provide confidence that much will be done.

As a result, even if the peace process is fully successful with respect to the Palestinians, Syria, and Jordan, Israeli security will still be threatened by the growth of long-range strategic threats. This will lead Israel to place even greater emphasis on its strategic deterrence, early warning, and pre-emptive capabilities. In addition, Israel is paying greater attention to the potential for ballistic missile defense as a means of blunting a first strike, allowing for massive retaliation.

### **Continued Reliance on the United States**

The United States has provided Israel with crucial political and economic support as well as advanced weapons and technology for over 20 years. In addition to strengthening Israeli deterrence, the U.S. offset the costs and risks of Israel's peace agreement with Egypt and the withdrawal from Sinai. Successive U.S. administrations have pledged to maintain Israel's qualitative military edge against the Arab states in order to balance the large amounts of advanced weaponry being sold to the Arabs. The U.S. is funding most of the Arrow ballistic missile defense project, which, it

is hoped, will assist in blunting the long-range strategic threat.

The special relationship between Israel and the U.S. has been explicitly cited, in the context of the peace process, by IDF Chief of Staff General Ehud Barak as one of the three pillars of Israeli security. The status of Israel's relations with Washington will determine the readiness of Israel to take security risks. As noted above, any Israeli-Syrian agreement which required the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Golan may involve U.S. commitments for the deployment of combat troops and to provide or operate early-warning stations. However, if there is conflict or tension in U.S.-Israeli relations, the Israeli leadership can be expected to act more cautiously regarding any troop redeployment or withdrawal in the Golan and the Judea/Samaria regions.

### Arms Control and Regional Security

Proposals for arms limitations in the Middle East are viewed with caution by Israeli leaders. Previous efforts such as the 1950s' Tripartite Declaration, international prohibitions on the use of chemical weapons, and the impact of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty on Iraq have demonstrated the weakness of this approach in the region. However, Israel did agree to participate in the multilateral working group on arms control and regional security (ACRS), which was created during the 1991 Madrid conference. Other regional participants include Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinians, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. Iran, Iraq, and Libya are not involved, while the Syrians have made participation in any multilateral talks, including ACRS, contingent on a bilateral agreement on the Golan Heights.

The possibility that arms limitations, in the context of regional peace agreements, can contribute to national security is still limited. Israeli policy emphasizes confidence and security-building measures, and limits on chemical and biological weapons, missiles, and conventional weapons. Any possible limits on nuclear forces are relegated to the last and distant stage in the process.

Regional CSBMs involving a number of states are seen as the critical first steps necessary "to build and nurture mutual confidence" and "to diminish the levels of suspicion, hostility and conflagration" after decades of intense religious violence and hatred. A high degree of cooperation, combined with direct, frequent and visible contacts with Arab military forces, is critical to the peace process. Among the specific proposals, which are based to some degree on the experience

gained through the CSCE, are measures to prevent surprise attacks, pre-notification agreements regarding large-scale military maneuvers, hot-lines and regular communications between military commanders, and a center to coordinate naval activities and respond to incidents in the Red Sea.

Concretely, arms control could contribute to Israeli security if agreements were reached to limit the acquisition and deployment of conventional arms such as tanks, combat aircraft, and artillery. Reductions in these areas by Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Iraq could reduce the conventional threat significantly. As of yet, the Arab states have refused to discuss such arms limitation arrangements.

The Arab states, as well as many extra-regional actors, have pressured Israel to accept limitations on its nuclear capability. A strategic nuclear deterrent has always been considered as a vital guarantee of national security by the Israelis. Such a deterrent is considered essential until peace agreements have been implemented, tested, and the existential threat to Israel has been eliminated. Until a durable peace has been established and threats to national survival have ended, calls for Israel to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty or open the Dimona nuclear complex for inspection are likely to be rejected.

In summary, strategically, the peace process and the prospects for territorial withdrawal involve significant risks for Israel. To respond to these risks, the Israeli military will need to increase the emphasis on early warning and offensive air capabilities. Costs and acquisitions of advanced weapons are likely to grow, and increased military preparedness will be necessary to respond quickly to a large-scale offensive. In addition, unless Iran and Iraq are brought into this process and their long-range capability to strike Israel with non-conventional weapons is decreased, the IDF will be forced to maintain its long-range strategic deterrent.

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