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IN THE NEW WORLD ORDER — THE THREAT TO ISRAEL CONTINUES

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Whatever steps have been taken toward a new world order after Iraq's defeat by the American-led United Nations coalition, it is clear that the threat to Israel continues in every respect — from Iraq, from Syria, and from the Bush-Baker peace initiative as it has taken form.

The Iraqi Non-Conventional Threat

Iraq's conventional military capability, which before the war numbered some 1,250,000 troops, 5,000 tanks, 7,000 artillery pieces, and 700 advanced combat aircraft, was severely damaged in the Gulf War. Out of 45-50 divisions, probably no more than 20 are still intact and many of those are of questionable quality. In a major sense, therefore, the short-term threat to Israel from Iraq has definitely been reduced.

Yet the very fact that Saddam Hussein is still in power requires a high

level of Israeli preparedness. If he remains, there is every likelihood that he will somehow try to make up the political damage to his image and policies by attacking Israel as soon as he is able. The war ended with the Iraqis still in possession of a significant chemical weapons capability and a number of Scud launchers. American and UN efforts to uncover and destroy all the remaining Iraqi non-conventional weapons have not been thorough and the long-term threat to Israel remains.

According to the International Atomic Energy Agency, Iraq has about 90 pounds of highly enriched weapons-grade uranium. Under the terms of the cease-fire resolution the United States and the United Nations have given Iraq until early August to destroy all the facilities, materials and weapons that are classified as non-conventional. One of the high-priority questions for Israel is whether the U.S. and the UN are

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capable of enforcing that resolution. We are hearing numerous reports from various sources, including the head of the UN commission assigned to verify the destruction of these weapons, that it is going to take much longer, that it is going to be much more difficult, and that, in fact, they may not be able to do the job.

American Guarantees No Substitute for Security

The implications of this are even more striking if we remember that when the U.S. asked the Israelis not to respond to the Iraqi missile attacks, the U.S., in turn, undertook to destroy all of Iraq's non-conventional weapons capability. From the Israeli perspective, the Americans made an agreement in requesting Israeli restraint. That agreement is extremely important from the point of view of asking the Israelis to take other risks. It is important from the point of view of American credibility. There is a deep question about whether the Americans can deliver on that pledge. This is not a trivial issue.

There is a deep concern that Iraq will come out of this war with a large chemical stockpile, with the capability of manufacturing chemical weapons, and with the ability to produce more Scuds and Scud launchers, completely in violation of the cease-fire agreement, and the promises that were made to Israel.

If the U.S. and the UN go in and physically destroy the entire Iraqi capability, that will send a very powerful signal to other countries in the region, such as Syria, that the development of chemical weapons and the use of missiles by any country will, indeed, bring a powerful response. If, however, the U.S. backs off, that will send a signal that, no matter what is said, there will be no American enforcement of its position on non-conventional weapons. Let us remember that when the Iraqis used chemical weapons against Iran and the Kurds during the Iran-Iraq war, there was also no action taken against them. Iraq took this as a signal that this was something they could get away with.

The Growing Syrian Threat

Both politically and militarily, Syria gained much from the Gulf war. In the early 1980s -- after the 1973 war and after the Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement -- President Assad declared that he was going to achieve strategic parity with Israel, meaning that he could go to war with a reasonable chance of taking the Golan Heights, if not more, and of doing significant damage to Israel, without aid from other Arab states.

Toward the end of the 1980s this Syrian effort basically ground to a halt. Their main arms supplier was the Soviet Union which, under Gorbachev, withdrew from the Cold War, stopped giving away weapons to its client states such as Syria, and restricted the availability of strategic weapons. For example, the Soviets refused to sell the SS-23 surface-to-surface missile which the Syrians had been seeking.

However, in the middle of 1991 the Syrians received \$2 billion -- basically a pay-off from the Saudis -- all of which has gone to purchase advanced offensive weaponry. While the Soviets had stopped giving away weapons, they, like the West, are certainly in the business of selling weapons. In addition, Czechoslovakia has agreed to sell hundreds of T-72 tanks to Syria, on top of the thousands of modern tanks that are already in the Syrian inventory. The Syrians are also shopping in China where they have apparently reached an agreement to purchase the M-9 surface-to-surface missile, which is in some ways superior to the SS-23s that the Soviets refused to sell them. The M-9 is capable of hitting any target in Israel and is solid-fueled, which makes it easier to launch and harder to destroy before it gets off the ground. North Korea now sells advanced weapons to Syria including the Scud-C missile, which is an improved version of the Scud-B but with a longer range and twice the payload. As a result of these missile purchases, the Syrian threat to Israel has grown significantly.

The Syrians are very aware of the impact that the Iraqi missiles had on Israel during the war. Basically, for a period of

four weeks Israel was paralyzed because of the relatively "primitive" Scud-Bs that the Iraqis used and the fear of chemical weapons. The Syrians are thought to have a more sophisticated chemical weapons capability than the Iraqis.

The hard facts are that the Syrians are developing a major military threat to Israel. For political reasons, some may say that this threat is not something the Syrians are likely to use in the short-term, but there is no guarantee of that, and the long-term is even more problematic for Israel. From the current point of view of an Israeli or any other military planner, political conditions and questions of intention are not the issue. Any Israeli planner has to take into account the worst case eventuality. This includes the Syrian threat, the possibility of an Arab coalition gearing up against Israel in a few years time, or even the possibility that in two or three years Iraq could conceivably rebuild its entire capability.

Of course, it would be foolish for the Syrians to assume that Israeli behavior in the war with Iraq would apply in a different situation. In the Gulf War, we had a situation in which the United States was pounding Iraq with over a thousand sorties a day, and in which Israel, militarily, did not have much to add. If there is a direct Syrian-Israeli confrontation, without the United States being involved, Israel would obviously be acting on its own. Also, technically, Syria is right next door and Damascus is very vulnerable. The threat of retaliation is much more visible to the Syrians than it was to the Iraqis. On the other hand, Syrian statements during the war and the pattern of Syrian arms purchases since the war indicate that they are clearly trying to imitate Iraqi behavior. The Syrians have gone to tremendous expense to buy Scud-Cs and M-9s because they see a large advantage in having these missiles to threaten Israel.

Little Prospect for Controlling Arms Sales

One of the interesting questions affecting the overall military balance is that of arms sales. At the present time, Iraq

cannot replace the weapons that were destroyed and cannot repair its infrastructure, communications, air defense or other things that the Americans destroyed, because it is almost entirely dependent on outside technology, personnel and assistance. During the war the Iraqis could not use many of the weapons they had purchased without a supply of foreign-made spare parts and foreigners to integrate and operate some of those systems. Yet, in a few years, the odds are that the Iraqis will have been able to purchase most of what was destroyed in the war.

The Americans still talk about sanctions, but, in fact, with the United States selling \$24 billion of weapons to other countries in the Middle East, the Soviets, Chinese, French, British and every other arms producer in the world is going to want a piece of the action. Why should the United States arms industry be able to sell \$24 billion in arms while every other country sits and watches? Of course, the only major country still open to sell to is likely to be Iraq. Based on these considerations, it is very likely that the French will resume their arms supply relationship with Iraq, as well as the Soviets, who need the hard cash. This means that the long-term conventional threat to Israel from Iraq remains and must be taken into account in Israeli strategic thinking.

Israeli planners used to worry about a combined Syrian-Iraqi thrust. With all the weapons that the Saudis have in stock and that they are obtaining from the United States, it must be remembered that they provided direct support for the Arab assault on Israel in 1973. Since there is no guarantee that the Saudi weaponry would not be thrown into a fight against Israel, any Israeli planner will have to take the Saudi arms warehouse into account.

Bush's Arms Control Plan Off Target

The American arms control proposal does not address these issues. It does not consider the conventional arms build-up of the Arab states, to which the United States is massively contributing.

Indeed, much of what is contained in

this proposal already exists, but it does not work. For instance, the Missile Technology Control Regime, signed in the mid-1980s, is supposed to prevent the export of missile technology to Iraq and Syria, but the Germans, who are signatories to that agreement, still sold the technology that the Iraqis used to make their improved-range Scuds. The British even subsidized the sale of missile technology to Iraq; the British government gave the company that sold the technology an export loan -- despite the fact that the British are signatories to the MTCR agreement. The Germans sold billions of dollars of chemical precursors for the Iraqi chemical weapons facilities, labelled "pesticides" and "fertilizers." From someone sitting in Israel with a gas mask, it does not really make any difference what is on the label. A serious arms control proposal must also deal with these "grey" or dual-use technologies, which are not addressed in the Bush proposal.

Asking Israel to Do What the U.S. Would Never Do

An additional aspect of arms control involves the political questions surrounding the possession of nuclear weapons. The United States is not really concerned about Israeli nuclear capability. The threat to U.S. interests and to world peace is the development of nuclear potential and chemical weapons in the Arab states. But the Arab states claim that Israel has nuclear weapons and that they need chemical weapons to protect themselves. The whole concept of trying to look at things symmetrically in the Middle East is absurd. Israel has less than 5 million people in a very tiny area and is extremely vulnerable to attack. Iraq has 17 million people, is many times larger than Israel, and there is no chance that Israel could do anything militarily to destroy Iraq.

Israelis still believe that if given an opportunity, the Arab states in the region, with the exception of Egypt which has a peace treaty, will take any military action against Israel that they feel they can get away with. If one looks at the statements

coming out of Syria and some of the other, more radical and active states involved in the conflict against Israel, they have no real fear of Israeli "aggression." It is an excuse. It sells well in the media. In fact, they are taking no steps to prevent any such Israeli "aggression." The Arab states are making little investment in defensive weapons or defensive capabilities. Their major effort is focused on purchasing the capability to strike at Israel. Therefore, simplistic efforts to equate Israeli and Arab military policies are absurd.

The U.S. has taken the easy way out on this issue and has proposed to include Israeli nuclear weapons in any broad arms control agreement. From the Israeli point of view, however, nuclear weapons are necessary to balance the tremendous and growing conventional weapons advantage in the Arab states.

The situation is very similar to the way in which the United States sought to use its nuclear weapons capability to counter Soviet conventional superiority in Central Europe. For 40 years the U.S. rejected the denuclearization of Europe until the Soviet Union agreed to remove all its conventional weapons from Europe -- to achieve something called "equal and balanced force reductions," including conventional weapons. The same type of proposals that the U.S. consistently rejected, particularly during the Reagan period, form the basis of what Bush is proposing for his Middle East arms control package. If these proposals were made to Congress and concerned the United States and the Soviet Union, they would be rejected instantly. President Reagan campaigned against these type of proposals in 1976 and 1980.

One cannot separate arms control in any way from political processes. There was no arms control of any significance between the United States and the Soviet Union except in periods of detente, when there was direct negotiation and willingness on both sides to take some risks. One cannot make arms control agreements by indirect or third-party types of agreements, or by international conferences. International conferences that produce

arms control agreements generally do not lead to significant compliance.

Basically, arms control has to be part of broader national security concerns. Arms control is not an idealistic exercise; if it is going to be successful it must be a realistic process which addresses the security concerns of all the countries involved. The Bush arms control proposal does not address most Israeli security concerns. It remains an open question whether this proposal in fact can be expanded to accommodate these concerns.

For the first time we are having at least some sort of dialogue about the possibilities. There is a favorable Israeli response and the Egyptians are interested in getting involved. The outstanding questions include whether this can be expanded to include Syria, Iran and Algeria (where Islamic fundamentalists are struggling to take over a country which already possesses a nuclear plant); whether serious export controls can be developed; and whether conventional weapons can be included. At present, there are no grounds for being overly optimistic about success for the Bush proposal.

Prospects for the Peace Process

From the point of view of the Israeli government and a large percentage of the Israeli population, the concern remains that the radical Arab countries have yet to acknowledge that Israel is here to stay in the Middle East. Therefore, a peace process which weakens Israel -- whether it is by giving up territory, limiting the amount of weapons Israel can purchase, or whatever else -- will eventually push Israel into a corner and war will result. If Israel looks weaker, it is very possible that the incentive to attack Israel will be greater.

On the other hand, if the peace process ends up similarly to the Egyptian-Israeli process, which, though far from ideal, included direct negotiations, an exchange of ambassadors, no military movement, large demilitarized zones, and communication between the countries, then the chances of

war will decrease. We have had continuous peace with Egypt since the agreement was signed and there is no current sign that this is going to change. If the Syrians sit down and negotiate a similar type of agreement, the chances of war will become smaller. What happens with Iraq, Libya and the more radical states in that process is a different question. The countries that are not a part of this process would probably become more radical.

Why did the Iraqis send 39 Scud missiles at Israel? One of the lessons from the Gulf War is that the radical Arab states are still able to use the threat of destroying Israel as a major source of unity and political support. Saddam Hussein's major achievement during the war was threatening and using his missiles against Israel, and his trump card was to try to get Israel into the war so that all the other Arab states would join him. It is that degree of hostility to Israel that is still the dominant Arab view. The majority cling to the belief that somehow they can defeat Israel militarily. This does not mean that the Israeli military is not capable of balancing this type of threat, but the costs would be very high.

Despite the rhetoric and American pledges during the war, there is no evidence of a "new regional order." Indeed, despite the war and the extraordinary Israeli restraint, the Arab military threat continues. Arms sales have accelerated, and other countries are actively expanding their capability to launch missiles at Israeli targets. As a result, Israeli military expenditures will continue to grow, and new strategies must be developed.

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