

The Eastern Mediterranean in the New Era of Major-Power Competition: Prospects for U.S.-Israeli Cooperation

**UNIVERSITY OF HAIFA-HUDSON INSTITUTE
CONSORTIUM ON THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN**

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Cover: The Israeli Navy participates in a combined exercise with U.S., French and Cypriot forces off the shores of Haifa. (Ilia Yefimovich/picture alliance via Getty Images)

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The study was produced in partnership with scholars at the University of Haifa's Maritime Policy & Strategy Research Center.



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I. INTRODUCTION

This is a study of Eastern Mediterranean security and how the United States and Israel can improve cooperation to protect their common interests. The study's particular focus is the maritime domain.

Few things in world affairs survive for millennia. It's also true that few are ever really new.

In the Eastern Mediterranean, what has endured for thousands of years is the strategic attention of great powers. The region retains it today, commanding interest not only from local and regional actors, but also from global players. As Iran works to extend its reach to the Mediterranean,¹ Russia, as it has for centuries, strives to exert its influence across the Middle East. The United States, on the other hand, has been signaling a desire to reduce its involvement in the region.

Remarkably, China too has become a player. Its increasing presence in the Middle East reflects commercial and strategic motives and signifies its rise as a force competing for global economic and military predominance. China is at once a security challenge and a close economic partner. It is the world's major rising and disruptive power and plays a huge role in global trade and investment.

In 2016, Hudson Institute formed a consortium with the newly created Haifa Research Center for Maritime Strategy to bring together Americans and Israelis to research Eastern Mediterranean energy and security matters.

Hudson Institute is a public-policy research organization – “think tank” – in Washington, DC founded in the 1960s by Herman Kahn and Max Singer. The University of Haifa plays the

leading role in the Mediterranean Sea Research Center of Israel (MERCI), a team effort in Israel of seven universities, one college and two governmental research institutes to study an array of scientific, technological, economic, security and environmental challenges and opportunities.

The University of Haifa-Hudson Institute consortium's first [report](#) appeared in September 2016. It set out a research agenda, which gave rise to several projects, including this study.



II. GENERAL FRAMEWORK OF THIS STUDY

The United States has been reducing its naval presence in the Eastern Mediterranean since the end of the Cold War in 1991. For the last decade, U.S. officials publicly committed themselves to this reduction by announcing a “rebalancing” policy – that is, lowering the national security priority of the Middle East and raising that of Asia. This has created a power vacuum in the Eastern Mediterranean, which Russia is filling.

Russia’s President Vladimir Putin exploits both America’s so-called pivot to Asia and the European Union’s economic and political disarray. Reprising the Great Game of the 19th century and the Cold War of the 20th, Russia has emerged as a counterweight to the West in Syria and beyond, playing significant military and diplomatic roles in the region.

Meanwhile, China is building itself into a world power capable of challenging America’s longstanding predominance. It is expanding its intelligence and armed forces into large, technologically sophisticated instruments with increasing geographic reach. Also, through its “belt and road” and “military-civilian fusion” initiatives, China is increasing its overseas economic clout, political influence and military capabilities, with serious attention to the Red Sea and Mediterranean. In Israel, China’s “belt and road” projects include the operation for twenty-five years of a soon-to-be-built shipping container facility at Haifa port.

The power vacuum in the Middle East has also encouraged Iran to intensify its efforts to expand its influence in the Eastern Mediterranean. In the eyes of the Sunni Arab states and Israel, the Iranian threat has become the region’s dominant strategic reality.

The Syrian civil war has radically altered the region. It is a humanitarian catastrophe of over half a million deaths and millions of refugees that have fled to Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan,

Russian President Vladimir Putin, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Iran’s President Hassan Rouhani together at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Council of Heads of State meeting in Bishkek on June 14, 2019. (VYACHESLAV OSELEDKO/AFP/Getty Images)

Europe and elsewhere. Iran invested heavily and successfully in preserving Syria's Assad regime. This advanced its plan, forcefully opposed by Israel, to create a land bridge between Iran and the Mediterranean. Saudi officials see Iran's activities in Syria as part of a strategy to encircle Saudi Arabia, which also includes aggressive Iranian military moves in Iraq, the Persian Gulf and Yemen.

Russia likewise invested heavily in preserving the Assad regime. The Russian military has exploited its success in Syria to upgrade Russian air and naval bases on the Eastern Mediterranean coast.

Turkey entered the Syrian civil war to attack both ISIS and the Syrian Kurds. This is part of a significant transformation of Turkey's domestic politics and foreign policy. In its first eight decades, the Republic of Turkey pursued integration into the West – a paramount goal of the republic's founder Kemal Ataturk. Now, however, under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, head of the country's Islamist party, Turkey is intent on reorienting itself toward the East. It is shedding democratic practices and institutions at home. Abroad, it pursues alignment with Russia, Iran, Qatar and Hamas, while estranging itself from NATO and confronting Cyprus, Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United States.

ISIS took advantage of regional turmoil a few years back to establish a caliphate in Iraq and Syria. Though the caliphate has now lost its territory, ISIS remains a lethal and disruptive organization of thousands of terrorists with skills honed in battle in Iraq, Syria and elsewhere.

The United States entered the fight in Syria to disarm Syria of chemical weapons and to oppose ISIS. The United States is not working to counter the influence and capabilities of Russia in Syria. It has taken action to counter Iranian military threats in the region generally, but has not struck Iranian forces in Syria.

Despite domestic support for disengagement, the United States continues to have vital interests in the Eastern Mediterranean region. Nonetheless, President Trump says he wants to reduce U.S. forces there. He urges other countries to play a larger role in regional security. Indeed, he says he welcomes a larger role for rivals and enemies of the United States – Russia and Iran – in fighting ISIS.²

THE REDUCED AMERICAN NAVAL PRESENCE IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN CREATED A POWER VACUUM THAT RUSSIA FILLED.

President Trump has had mixed success in pressing U.S. allies and partners to do more to advance our common regional interests. **Current U.S. policy may create opportunities for Israel, the most militarily capable power in the region and America's most reliable partner, to intensify its defense cooperation with the United States, including in the maritime domain.**

It is time for Israel to develop a proper maritime strategy and to increase parliamentary and public awareness of the maritime domain.

Since its birth Israel has focused far more on its land-based concerns, but Israel now has compelling economic, military and diplomatic maritime interests. These include the development of its Mediterranean gas fields, security concerns relating to Gaza and Israel's maritime boundary dispute with Lebanon.

Related to all this is the broader question of how Israel might facilitate economic development among its neighbors. Relieving humanitarian distress is inherently worthwhile and contributing to its neighbors' prosperity may, under the right circumstances, increase political stability and diminish the intensity of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The interests of the United States and Israel in the region largely align. Both countries aim to uphold Western democratic principles, counter Iran, oppose radical Islamism, prevent the further proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and support freedom of navigation at sea and in the air. Both are committed to preserving Israel's ability to defend itself.

This report offers policy recommendations for the United States and Israel:

1. **Collaboration on strategies for dealing with China – in particular, how to regulate commercial relations in light of China’s aggressive national security policies, including a way forward regarding the Chinese presence in Haifa port;**
2. **Cooperation aimed at inducing Iran to remove its forces from Syria;**
3. **Better understanding of Russia’s increased military and diplomatic influence in the region and the implications for U.S.-Israeli relations;**
4. **Encouraging U.S. Central Command to make greater use of Israel’s capabilities in its operational plans;**
5. **Heeding key points from the report of the U.S. National Defense Strategy Commission regarding repair of U.S. defenses;**
6. **Weighing the pros and cons of varieties of a possible U.S.-Israeli defense treaty;**
7. **Creating a new body under the U.S.-Israeli Defense Policy Advisory Group to explore bilateral development of key technologies specified in the U.S. National Defense Strategy; and**
8. **Other ways to cooperate to serve their common security interests.**

**SINCE ITS BIRTH ISRAEL HAS
FOCUSED FAR MORE ON LAND-
BASED CONCERNS, BUT IT
NOW ALSO HAS COMPELLING
MARITIME INTERESTS.**



III. THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN: AMERICAN INTERESTS AND INDIFFERENCE

A. THE “PIVOT TO ASIA” AND A POWER VACUUM

A key strategic feature of the Eastern Mediterranean is a vacancy: the lack of a substantial permanent American naval presence. During the Cold War, the U.S. Sixth Fleet routinely maintained at least one aircraft carrier battle group (and normally two) in the Mediterranean.³ Now, the Sixth Fleet's permanent naval presence comprises one command ship based in Italy and four Aegis missile-defense capable destroyers based in Rota, Spain on the Atlantic Ocean.

THE SIXTH FLEET'S PERMANENT NAVAL PRESENCE COMPRISES ONLY ONE COMMAND SHIP BASED IN ITALY AND FOUR AEGIS DESTROYERS BASED ON SPAIN'S ATLANTIC COAST.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (R) and an Israeli officer pilot of one of the first two F-35 stealth fighter jets purchased in the United States affix a Star of David to the jet after it landed on December 12, 2016 at Israel's Nevatim Air force base near Beersheva. (JACK GUEZ/AFP/Getty Images)

This reduction of U.S. naval forces in the Mediterranean began when the Cold War ended in 1991. It was exacerbated by a reduction in the total number of ships in the U.S. Navy and by the change in priorities related to the support requirements for the protracted combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. It continued through a succession of U.S. administrations. President Obama committed to the reduction when he promised to disengage the United States from the Middle East and to give priority to the Asia-Pacific region. Initially, he labeled his strategy “pivot to Asia.”⁴

As top Obama administration officials made clear, that strategy was rooted in negative views of America’s post-World War II role in world affairs, especially in the Middle East and especially during the George W. Bush administration.⁵ Even Republicans, however, agreed that U.S. policy makers should be paying greater attention to the economically booming Asia-Pacific region.

During the early years of the Syrian civil war, which began in 2011, the United States played no substantial role. When the United States eventually became involved in September 2014 with an air campaign and then in ground combat in late 2015 President Obama focused on fighting ISIS and pressuring Assad to relinquish his chemical weapons.⁶ During the Trump administration, U.S. forces in Syria have aimed to destroy ISIS, but not oust Assad from power or pressure his Russian allies.

President Trump has more or less adopted President Obama’s policy of disengagement from the Middle East. Mr. Trump seems especially intent on keeping America’s role in Syria to a minimum. Nevertheless, in his administration’s early days, he gave U.S. forces greater freedom of action against ISIS in Syria and Iraq. The results were positive as ISIS now controls virtually no territory and its claimed caliphate has been destroyed. Also, in May 2019, he sent a carrier strike group to the Persian Gulf in response to intelligence reports that Iran, facing revived and intensified U.S. economic sanctions, was planning to attack the United States or U.S. interests. He also deployed an additional 1,500 troops for force protection.⁷ After a series of Iranian attacks on oil tankers near the Hormuz Strait, the Defense Department said it would deploy an additional 1,000 troops to the region.⁸

Though willing to confront Iran with words and military forces in the Persian Gulf, President Trump and his team generally have little to say about Iran’s role in Syria and rarely call attention to Iran’s strategic interests there.⁹ Rather, in discussing U.S. interests in Syria, President Trump has stressed the fight against ISIS.

In December 2018, Mr. Trump shocked officials in the Middle East and even in his own administration when he announced that he is withdrawing all U.S. forces from Syria. He said Turkey and other powers would finish the job of destroying ISIS there.¹⁰ He then modified his position, saying that 400 U.S. troops will remain and latter news reports said the number may be higher.¹¹ He does not speak of countering Russian influence in Syria. Indeed, as we have noted, he said he expects that Russia, Iran and the Assad regime will help eliminate ISIS from Syria.¹²

There are no current plans to reverse the drastic reduction in U.S. naval power in the Mediterranean since the end of the Cold War. President Trump has prudently increased the U.S. defense budget but only sustained robust funding will allow for a major increase in the assets of the Navy or the other services. Even if more funds are provided, there will be a lag time before industry could produce a meaningful increase in assets deployable to the region. What the United States is spending on its navy is far less than what is needed to preserve the predominance it once had throughout the Mediterranean.

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B. A REGION OF IMPORTANCE

The Eastern Mediterranean is a focus of strategic interest for *local* actors – chiefly, Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Egypt, ISIS, the Palestinian Authority and Hamas – *regional* powers Iran and Saudi Arabia and *world* powers Russia and China. American disengagement increases incentives for those actors and powers to assert themselves.

The Eastern Mediterranean has facilities of economic and security importance, including seaports, air bases, natural gas infrastructure, undersea communication cables and other equipment that enables new information and e-commerce technologies. In time, networks of undersea pipelines for gas and water will expand. For Israel and the United States, the risks of damage to and intrusion into this infrastructure will grow as others' maritime capabilities expand in the region.

Increasingly, remotely operated vehicles paired with robotic manipulators and tools will endanger the energy and communications infrastructure lying on the seabed. These vehicles, robots and devices may swim, crawl or lay dormant near critical equipment until commanded into use. As happened with unmanned aerial vehicles, these undersea tools will proliferate as costs decrease. More capability will be miniaturized and packed into smaller vehicles.

In the future, underwater drone threats will no longer have to be deployed or operated from naval ships or submarines with specialized handling systems. Merchant, fishing and pleasure craft will be able to carry them to launch points and release them. Unmanned underwater systems will be able to swim from regional ports and naval bases. Advances in battery and other power technology will increase their endurance.

Innovations in commercial and military technology require strategists to consider the Eastern Mediterranean as part of a region far broader than its own waters. That region includes not just the Mediterranean itself, but also the surrounding seas, including the Caspian Sea, Black Sea, Red Sea, Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf. Russia has already exerted influence in the Eastern Mediterranean by launching military operations from the Black and Caspian Seas. China's first overseas military base, in Djibouti, puts its military forces at the choke point of the sea-lane that connects the Indian Ocean with the Red Sea and Mediterranean. What happens to Iranian ships in the Mediterranean can produce responses affecting freedom of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz.

**THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN
SHOULD BE SEEN AS PART OF
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ALSO THE CASPIAN SEA, BLACK
SEA, RED SEA, ARABIAN SEA AND
PERSIAN GULF.**

However much U.S. leaders prefer to focus their strategic attention elsewhere, the Eastern Mediterranean region will continue to affect important U.S. military and economic interests. At stake are the security of U.S. friends and partners, the challenges of Islamist extremism (including terrorism), proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, oil supplies, refugee flows and perceptions of American reliability.

Americans can avert their eyes, withdraw forces and wish to disengage from the Middle East, but they cannot actually isolate themselves from it. Middle Eastern pathologies will affect American interests whether or not the U.S. government “pivots” and whether or not U.S. officials devote attention and resources to the region.

Israel has always had vital *economic* interests in the maritime domain, and especially in the Eastern Mediterranean. Virtually all of Israel's imports and exports travel by sea. With the recent development of Israel's large offshore natural gas fields, the Mediterranean has dramatically improved Israel's energy posture. Israel is energy independent and can export some of its gas. The Mediterranean is a key source of distilled drinking water. It provides recreation for Israelis and is crucial for Israel's tourism industry. Meanwhile, the Red Sea's economic importance to Israel is growing with Israel's burgeoning trade with China, India and other Asian countries.

The maritime domain also matters greatly to Israeli *security*. The main threats to Israel now are the massive number and increasing accuracy of missiles and rockets in hostile hands and its regional enemies' efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction. Those enemies intend to erode Israel's national

morale and resilience. The maritime domain is a key element of the multi-dimensional space from which Israel can deter and defend itself against such threats. Iran is ideologically committed to Israel's destruction and has been increasing its military capabilities while retaining its nuclear weapons potential. As a result, the region's seas have become more important weapons delivery zones for Iran. For Israel, the proximate seas have become a more important element of its strategic depth.

The totality of Israel's relations with the Palestinians is not within the scope of this study, but the issue's connections to maritime security – e.g., sales of Israeli natural gas to the Palestinian Authority and proposals for a port for Gaza – are addressed.

C. RUSSIA

Russia is a geographically distant actor that has taken advantage most aggressively of the power vacuum created by America's "pivot" policy. It is emerging as a dominant military and political force in the Middle East. It intervened heavily in Syria's civil war and was instrumental in saving the Assad regime. It was instrumental also in the Iran nuclear negotiations, sometimes supporting pressure on Iran and sometimes defending Iran at the United Nations. Russia engineered a new five-nation treaty among Caspian Sea states, assigning them their littoral rights.¹³ And it negotiated an end to Syria's civil war.

For its decisive military support to Assad, Russia has been rewarded with access in Syria and control over upgraded military bases – the Tartus naval base and the Khmeimim air base.¹⁴ From those bases it can project power into the Middle East, the Balkans and farther west along the Mediterranean. In conflict, Russia is positioned to execute an area-denial strategy against the United States.

In Syria, Russia's military operations decisively affected the civil war and also tested and demonstrated capabilities that showed off Russian boldness, lethality, flexibility and reach.¹⁵ Russia used manned aircraft to strike targets in Syria beginning in September 2015. Many such attacks were launched from Khmeimim, which it has, since that date, expanded and improved with new radar, drone and other technology.¹⁶ The attacks included the first combat use of different types of Russian precision-guided munitions.¹⁷

Russia is using Syria as a testing ground for its emerging, advanced electronic warfare capabilities. In April 2018, U.S. Army General Raymond A. Thomas III, Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command, commented, "Right now in Syria

we are operating in the most aggressive EW [electronic warfare] environment on the planet." Our adversaries, he added, "are testing us every day, knocking our communications down, disabling our EC-130s, et cetera."¹⁸

Russia attacked Syrian rebel targets from the Caspian Sea. It used Kilo-submarine-launched and surface-ship-launched land-attack cruise missiles.¹⁹ It struck Raqaa in Syria from a submarine in the Mediterranean. The Russian Defense Minister announced his forces' use of Kalibr cruise missiles fired from the Rostov-on-Don submarine.²⁰ Russia sent a private contractor military force – referred to in press reports as "paid Russian mercenaries" or "little green men" – to fight for the Assad regime.²¹ Russian manned aircraft bombed Syria from a base in Iran. Though Iran did not publicize the attack, Russia did.²² During the summer of 2018, to support Assad's attack on Syria's last major rebel base, Russia deployed a substantial naval force into the Mediterranean, including the aircraft carrier Kuznetsov.²³ Through maritime operations, Russia has extended the range of its military influence. The Russian presence creates new "rules of the game" throughout the Middle East, affecting Israel's ability to operate freely.

RUSSIA HAS CREATED NEW "RULES OF THE GAME" THROUGHOUT THE MIDDLE EAST, AFFECTING ISRAEL'S ABILITY TO OPERATE FREELY.

Russia's basing arrangements in the Levant will allow it to stage, repair and operate autonomous underwater systems. It already has advanced surveillance, reconnaissance and operational capabilities for interdicting undersea communications cables. Its Syria-based submarines in the Mediterranean not only can launch cruise missiles at land targets, but also threaten undersea infrastructure.²⁴ U.K. Chief of Defence Air Chief Marshall Sir Stuart Peach warned in December 2017, "There is a new risk to our way of life that is the vulnerability of the cables that crisscross the seabed. Can you imagine a scenario where those cables are cut or disrupted, which would immediately and potentially catastrophically affect both our media and economy, as well as other ways of living?"²⁵ Soon before he spoke, Russia had deployed to the eastern Mediterranean its oceanographic research vessel *Yantar*, which, according to the

Russian parliament's official publication, is outfitted for deep sea surveillance and "connecting to top-secret communication cables." *Rossiya*, Russia's state-owned TV network, reported that *Yantar* can connect undersea cables and also "cut and jam underwater sensors."²⁶

Russia has multiple reasons to intervene in the Eastern Mediterranean – to aid Syrian regime allies of longstanding and to gain leverage against the United States. Among its main regional interests, however – in fact, among Russia's main interests generally – is increasing world energy prices. The Russian economy is largely the business of exporting oil and gas.²⁷ This has been true for decades. Russia and Putin depend for their existence on high prices for energy. It is surprising how many articles are written about Russia's Middle East or other foreign policies that fail to mention this point.

A key to understanding what Russia is doing in the Eastern Mediterranean region is to recognize that it wants to have the power to influence the energy-related decisions of Saudi Arabia and other important producing states. This helps explain why it is wrong to assume that Russia shares U.S. interests in Middle East stability. On the contrary, Russia often favors instability precisely because that contributes to upward pressure on energy prices.

Russia also has a major interest in arms sales.²⁸ Because Russia's business interests receive too little attention, they warrant emphasis here, though Russia's policies are not driven solely by such considerations.

President Trump's national security strategy names Russia as one of the two countries in the world (the other being China) that "challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity" and that "are determined to make economies less free and less fair, to grow their militaries, and to control information and data to repress their societies and expand their influence."²⁹

Russia is now a principal power broker in Syria. When it saved the Assad regime, it ensured the success of Iran's pro-Assad investment and effectively aligned itself with the Shiite axis of the Iranian regime, the Syrian regime and Hezbollah. This gives it leverage both with the axis and with the opponents of that axis: Turkey, Saudi Arabia and other Sunni-run states, as well as Israel.

In Israel's intensifying clash with Iran in Syria, Russia occupies a strategic position. Iran is trying to create a capability to threaten Israel from Syria. To prevent this, Israel has used its aircraft to destroy Iranian assets in Syria, keeping them away from the

RUSSIA OFTEN FAVORS INSTABILITY PRECISELY BECAUSE THAT CONTRIBUTES TO UPWARD PRESSURE ON ENERGY PRICES.

Israeli border. Russia, however, is the dominant military power in Syria, so Israel needs its cooperation or at least its acquiescence in the campaign to keep Iran at bay.

Accordingly, from the head-of-government level on down, Israel has cultivated close communication with Russia regarding Syria. Russia is not actively restraining Iran, but neither is it preventing Israeli strikes against Iranian forces in Syria. Israel's relations with Russia deteriorated following the downing of a Russian IL-20 plane by Syrian anti-aircraft fire during an attack by the Israeli air force near Latakia in September 2018, but Israeli and Russian officials have worked to resolve the incident and prevent reoccurrences. Russia appears to want to avoid any confrontation between its own forces and Israel. Israeli and Russian military commanders have arranged to de-conflict their operations. Russia is improving Syria's air defenses. It has delivered S-300 air defense missile batteries and is training the Syrians to use them. Meanwhile, Russian soldiers are presumably manning these batteries. The S-300 could threaten Israeli aircraft and, if upgraded to the longer-range S-400, the danger would increase. President Putin has said he wants all foreign troops to leave Syria. This seems to apply to Iranian and Turkish but not Russian troops.

Russia and the U.S.-Israeli relationship. U.S. officials worry about Russia's increasing military power in the Eastern Mediterranean, though President Trump has not demanded that Russia remove its forces from Syria. It would serve U.S. interests if Russia were successfully pressured into leaving Syria now that ISIS is largely gone.

Some U.S. officials, though not publicly, have suggested that Israel should apply such pressure. Their implication is that Israel should focus less on cooperating with Russia in Syria and more on making it uncomfortable for Russian forces to entrench there.

Criticism along these lines is not U.S. policy, but it creates an irritant in the U.S.-Israeli relationship. Each country would benefit from a clearer understanding of the other's strategic concerns.

Israeli officials say they are not in a position to treat Russia as an enemy. As militarily capable as Israel is, it is not strong enough to fight it. A major dispute with Russia would make it harder if not impossible for Israel to strike Iranian forces in Syria – and that is Israel’s main interest there, an interest that the United States shares (whether or not publicly stated). The Israelis do not want Russia defending Iranian forces in Syria. They do not want Israeli forces fighting Russian forces, nor do they want Russia deploying its most advanced air defenses in Syria.

During the Cold War, when Israel worked with the United States in direct opposition to the Soviets and their clients, the strategic environment was different. Unlike now, the Middle East was a high U.S. priority. The United States maintained a strong military posture there, dominated the Mediterranean Sea and actively worked to contain Soviet influence.

After the Cold War, as noted above, and especially since the George W. Bush administration, U.S. policy toward the region changed. The bywords for U.S. strategy became “pivot” and “disengagement.” Early in Syria’s civil war, the U.S. government made clear it would not become entangled. In particular, it refused to impose a no-fly zone. Reasonable people differ as to whether those policies were wise, but it is clear that they allowed Russia to increase its power and influence in the region and to play a decisive military role in Syria’s civil war, to dominate Syria’s skies and establish a relatively strong Russian naval presence in the Eastern Mediterranean.

President Trump shares his predecessor’s desire to disengage from the Middle East and keep American involvement in Syria to a minimum. The deployment in May of U.S. forces to the Persian Gulf to counter Iranian threats seems to be the exception that proves the rule. The goal is to deter, not fight, a war with the Iranians. President Trump is calling on Iran’s leaders to negotiate with him. The United States has no plans to restore its Cold War-era military strength in the Mediterranean. U.S. officials are not pressing Russia to withdraw its forces from Syria. Under the circumstances, it is not realistic to expect Israel to do so.

It would be a mistake, however, to fail to recognize that many U.S. officials view Russia with intense and well-grounded concern. That Russia for its own reasons gives Israel a free hand against Iran in Syria should not blind anyone to the disturbing essence of President Putin’s aggressive activities. Examples abound. They include Russia’s seizures of territory in Georgia and Ukraine³⁰ and brazen assassinations of anti-Putin critics – journalists and politicians – perpetrated at home and abroad.³¹ Russia directs cyber operations against the United States³² and exerts itself to influence U.S. elections.³³ President Putin

has invested heavily in modernizing Russia’s nuclear forces, strategic and tactical.³⁴ His government is producing nuclear-capable missiles prohibited by the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, which is why the U.S. government withdrew from the treaty in August 2019.³⁵ Russia also is conducting explosive nuclear testing in violation of its promise to adhere to the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban.³⁶ Russian military aircraft “buzz” – that is, challenge in close encounters – U.S. ships and aircraft.³⁷ These tactics were commonplace during the Cold War and both sides agreed to formal measures intended to limit the risks of such behavior. Russia has announced that it has successfully tested hypersonic weapons that can defeat current U.S. missile defenses.³⁸ Having invaded Ukraine to seize the Crimean Peninsula, Russian naval forces blocked the Sea of Azov.³⁹

Israeli officials can pursue necessary cooperation with Russia in Syria while still reassuring the United States that they take Russian provocations seriously. And they can reassure their American friends that Israel values its ties to the United States above its other international relationships. Pragmatic, unsentimental Israeli officials may not be accustomed to ritualistic pledges of friendship and loyalty of this kind, but it would be a mistake to underestimate their importance.

Strategic alliances are not self-perpetuating. It takes conscious effort by alliance supporters to preserve trust between the partners at the official level and, in democratic countries, to preserve crucial popular support. It can be fatal to take these matters for granted. If the alliance is not explained, reaffirmed and put into action over and over again across the years, it will lose support in the government or in the population in general. New officials and legislators come into office continually and have no knowledge of how the alliance proved itself mutually valuable in the past. Senior officials – longtime veterans of close allied cooperation – often assume that the alliance’s premises are so well and widely known that they go without saying. That is a dangerous mistake, however. If its principles and benefits are not continually restated and celebrated, an alliance can easily become vulnerable to domestic attack, with allies disparaged for free riding, weakness or lack of loyalty. A senior U.S. statesman once likened maintaining a strategic relationship to fighting weeds in a garden – constant attention is required to keep the irritants from taking over.

These realities apply to the U.S.-Israeli strategic alliance, as they do to others. Though there are compelling reasons to maintain the partnership, **Israeli officials should not take for granted that their U.S. counterparts are acquainted with**

the history of the two countries' strategic cooperation. They should not take for granted that U.S. officials are confident of Israeli loyalty to the alliance. When Israeli officials, in discussions with the United States, note with satisfaction the cooperation Russia is extending to Israel, it is important also to reaffirm Israel's appreciation for U.S. concerns about Russia's hostile and threatening actions around the globe.

For U.S. officials, Israel's relations with Russia are a source of concerns, but also useful opportunities. Israel organized and hosted trilateral meetings on June 25, 2019 of the national security advisers of Israel, the United States and Russia and their staffs. It allowed the American John Bolton and the Israeli Meir Ben Shabbat to appeal jointly to Russian Nikolai Patrushev to help compel Iranian forces to leave Syria. Beside Iran and Syria, the meetings addressed Ukraine, arms control and Venezuela.⁴⁰ There was no precedent for these high-level trilateral discussions, which U.S. officials say they are grateful that Israel arranged them.

D. CHINA

The nature of the strategic challenge from China in the Eastern Mediterranean is not as obvious, as conventional or as exclusively military as that presented by Russia and its air and naval forces. China's emergence as a world power has been underway for decades, but it accelerated stunningly in the last few years since President Xi Jinping came to power, consolidated his authority and adopted military, diplomatic and economic policies that are boldly ambitious, nationalistic and far-sighted.

Perhaps the greatest strategic challenge facing the United States now is how to regulate its business and other relations with China in light of President Xi's aggressive aims and his determination to "fuse" China's commercial and military interests. Given China's economic importance in the world, it is an unprecedented problem. The answer is not to stop all trade with China; that is not necessary, realistic or advisable from a business point of view. But obliviousness is not the answer either. **It would be reckless to ignore the role of economic activity, including private commercial transactions, in China's defense policy and national security strategy.**

The challenge has become reasonably clear only in the last half dozen years or so. The United States has by no means mastered it. U.S. officials are just beginning to develop the necessary new laws, policies and initiatives. They are just beginning to discuss, debate and sometimes quarrel with allies about how to counter Chinese ambitions regarding 5G internet infrastructure, artificial

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intelligence, quantum computing, advanced manufacturing technology, cyber operations, influence over critical facilities (e.g., seaports) and other militarily sensitive matters. Such discussions are already generating friction. The stakes are high and will weigh heavily in U.S. foreign policy. Attitudes toward China will be an important factor in shaping future U.S. relations with Britain, Germany, France, Italy and other important allies of longstanding, as well as with Israel.

Israel has an outsize role in this matter because of its prominence in technological innovation. U.S. officials have to pay attention to Israeli-Chinese trade and investment. Israeli officials have an early-stage opportunity to work closely with the United States in thinking the problems through and developing common approaches to protecting leading-edge intellectual property. The two countries should consider creating a formal mechanism for doing this, perhaps a committee of the U.S.-Israeli Joint Political-Military Group that focuses on technology beyond traditional military applications.

Chinese national security strategy is based on historical themes that the ruling Chinese Communist Party promotes in its schools and museums and in the speeches of government officials. First is China's "century of humiliation," beginning in the 1830s, inflicted by the Western powers and Japan. Second is China's rescue from this plight in 1949, when the Communist Party led by Mao Zedong took over through revolution. Third, China has been transcending its long humiliation by building its strength over the last seventy years.

Fearing that others might stifle its emergence as a great power, China long-adhered to a policy articulated by Mao's successor, Deng Xiaoping, which called for maintaining a non-aggressive low profile as China grew its power. The policy became famous through Deng's dictum: "hide your strength, bide your time."

President Xi, however, has moved China into a new era. Leaving behind the "hide and bide" policy, he has declared that China stands "tall and firm in the East" and should now "take centre stage in the world."⁴¹ China is asserting itself. It is, for example, claiming sovereignty over vast areas in the South China Sea that, according to the Law of the Sea Treaty, are international.⁴² The Philippines took the matter to the tribunal of the Law of the Sea Treaty, which ruled that China's claims were prohibited. Though a treaty party, China is ignoring the ruling.⁴³ Its claims have created conflict not only with the Philippines, but also with Japan, Taiwan, Vietnam and other neighbors. China has threatened these countries, punishing some by severing their underwater cables and sinking their fishing boats.⁴⁴ To bolster its claims, China is creating islands in the South China Sea through land reclamation and building military facilities there, despite President Xi's personal promises to refrain from militarizing the islands.⁴⁵

Beyond its own littoral, China cannot currently contest U.S. control of the seas. It does however aim to become a maritime great power consistent with its maritime strategic interests.⁴⁶ China has large global merchant and fishing fleets. Sea lanes of communication are important to its economic growth and well-being. Chinese President Xi is committed to developing the capability to provide what Chinese doctrine calls "open seas protection." As long as its economy can support growth in the Navy's size and capability, China can be expected to increase such protection – that is, its blue water capability and competence, including its ability to project power.

Through prolific naval shipbuilding, deployment of a fleet of aircraft carriers, amphibious ships, surface vessels and submarines, development of missiles, conduct of long-range missions and establishment of numerous facilities abroad that can facilitate blue-water naval operations, China shows its determination to be a global maritime power.⁴⁷ If the U.S. naval presence in strategic locations wanes further and China maintains its trajectory, China will in time enjoy a sea control advantage.

The Eastern Mediterranean is far from the Chinese navy's traditional area of patrol, but over the last decade Chinese warships have operated in and around the region. In February 2011, China deployed a frigate and four military transport aircraft to Libya to help in a major non-combatant evacuation

CHINA LONG ADHERED TO DENG XIAOPING'S POLICY OF MAINTAINING A NON-AGGRESSIVE PROFILE WHILE BUILDING POWER. PRESIDENT XI, HOWEVER, HAS MOVED BEYOND THE "HIDE AND BIDE" POLICY.

(transporting over 35,000 Chinese nationals).⁴⁸ It sent warships to war-stricken Yemen in March 2015 to remove citizens of China and nine other countries.⁴⁹ Of singular importance was China's inauguration in August 2017 of its first overseas military base in Djibouti. It is strategically located on the tip of the Horn of Africa at the choke point between, on the one side, the Indian Ocean, and on the other, the Red Sea, Suez Canal and Mediterranean.⁵⁰

One of China's grandest strategic enterprises is President Xi's Belt and Road Initiative, which involves massive loans and huge infrastructure construction projects around the world. A hallmark of this initiative is Chinese-furnished financing that often exceeds what the foreign government debtors can service. The loans give Chinese officials extraordinary leverage. Some critics call this "predatory economics; others call it "debt diplomacy."⁵¹ Unfortunately, the United States, its allies and like-minded partners have not generally been able to offer alternative arrangements to meet other countries' infrastructure needs along Eurasia's important trade routes.

IF THE U.S. NAVAL PRESENCE WANES FURTHER AND CHINA MAINTAINS ITS TRAJECTORY, CHINA WILL IN TIME ENJOY A SEA CONTROL ADVANTAGE.

A major element of Belt and Road is China's construction of a globe-girdling network of strategically located maritime ports, many of which China then either owns or has secured lengthy operating agreements. The large new container facility in Haifa port is part of this network. A Chinese state-owned company has an exclusive contract to operate it for twenty-five years beginning in 2021.

China owns, operates or has plans to own or operate ports in scores of places, including Burma, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Djibouti, Egypt, Israel, Turkey, Greece, Italy, Spain, Morocco, France, Belgium and the Netherlands. In its 2018 report on Chinese military power, the U.S. Defense Department focused attention on the port project within the Belt and Road Initiative. The report highlighted the financing and long-term lease arrangements China made at Hambantota, Sri Lanka and in Piraeus, Greece and Darwin, Australia, noting that the logistics and basing infrastructure there will serve China's "overseas military logistics needs," allowing it "to project and sustain military power at greater distances."⁵²

Reporting on China's takeover of the Gwadar port in Pakistan, the *Financial Times* explained how China turned a commercial project into a military base: "The Gwadar [Pakistan] template, where Beijing used its commercial know-how and financial muscle to secure ownership over a strategic trading base, only to enlist it later into military service, has been replicated in other key locations." An Indian research analyst said, "There is an inherent duality in the facilities that China is establishing in foreign ports, which are ostensibly commercial but quickly upgradeable to carry out essential military missions."⁵³

Control over Gwadar can help China alter the military alignment not only of Pakistan but also of Saudi Arabia. In both cases, realignment would be unfavorable to the United States. China can use its close ties with Pakistan as a means of drawing Saudi Arabia more into China's orbit. China is of course interested in Saudi Arabia as a source of oil, and the China-Pakistan-Saudi triangle also raises questions about possible nuclear proliferation. These are matters of concern for India, Israel, the United States and other western countries.

Belt and Road's strategic significance extends beyond the physical facilities involved. China uses the initiative to promote its own information technology standards and e-commerce platforms in such a way that competition from non-Chinese companies will be increasingly difficult in the future.⁵⁴ In working to set standards that favor Chinese hardware and software, Chinese technology companies aim not just to obtain commercial clout, but to give Chinese officials access –

HAIFA PORT'S NEW CONTAINER FACILITY IS PART OF CHINA'S BELT AND ROAD STRATEGY TO ACCESS AND CONTROL SEAPORTS AROUND THE WORLD. A CHINESE STATE-OWNED COMPANY HAS CONTRACTED TO OPERATE THIS NEW FACILITY FOR TWENTY-FIVE YEARS BEGINNING IN 2021.

clandestine as well as overt – to vast quantities of technological, commercial, personal and other information – all of which is exploitable for economic and strategic purposes.

The Chinese government integrates commercial and strategic activities to a much greater extent than do Western governments. One of China's most important national security initiatives is the Military-Civilian Fusion Policy. It was announced personally by President Xi and is supervised by a commission that he chairs. President Xi makes no effort to hide the commitment to take advantage of civilian business activities to strengthen China's military power. He says, "implementing the strategy of military-civilian integration is a prerequisite for building integrated national strategies and strategic capabilities and for realizing the Party's goal of building a strong military in a new era."⁵⁵

As reported on Chinese state television (June 21, 2017), President Xi said, "The ideas, decisions and plans of military and civilian integration must be fully implemented in all fields of national economic development and defense building."⁵⁶

China's position in the world is arguably unprecedented. It is a peer strategic competitor of the United States and simultaneously America's major trade and investment partner. It is competing economically, politically, technically and militarily. Much of China's trade and investment relates to technology and is helping China improve its ability to confront America militarily. In contrast, the Soviet Union during the Cold War was never a

major world economic power or a major trade and investment partner of the United States.

The United States cannot now think of China simply as an enemy in traditional terms. Nor can it “contain” China as the Soviet Union was economically isolated and restricted in its access to hard currency and high technology. Export controls worked well against the Soviet Union in large part because, at the time, the distinction between military and civilian technology was reasonably well defined. That distinction is far less clear now. Also, China is an integral part of the world’s advanced economy, which the Soviet Union never was.

China, however, is subject to deterrence. A key deterrent is to hold at risk one of its vital assets, its seaborne trade. The key Chinese Communist Party claim to legitimacy is increasing prosperity, which depends on such trade. This gives impetus to the maritime element of the Belt and Road Initiative.

U.S. officials make efforts to learn from China’s neighbors – Japan, India and Taiwan, for example. Israeli officials would benefit from doing the same.

The United States and Israel are not going to stop doing business with China. But they should keep clearly in mind the Chinese government’s increasingly militaristic national security policy and its Military-Civilian Fusion Policy. China has and will continue to strengthen its military capabilities with whatever assets or technologies it acquires abroad through commercial intercourse.

The United States, Israel and the rest of the democratic world need to consider how they should regulate their dealings with China under the circumstances. Should they prevent certain kinds of trade and investment – for example, regarding 5G technology and AI? Regarding types of trade and investment that should continue, how best to mitigate inherent risks to national security? Should the United States, Israel and others adopt the policy that all ports should be owned and operated only by their own respective nationals? Israel wouldn’t allow a company owned by a foreign power to own or operate a major part of Ben Gurion Airport. Should it adopt the same position for all major parts of Haifa port?

The Trump administration just sanctioned Turkey – cut it out of the F-35 aircraft program – because it is engaged in harmful militarily significant trade with Russia, discussed below. That severe penalty against an important NATO ally is a sign of the

PRESIDENT XI HAS ORDERED CHINESE COMPANIES TO EXPLOIT ALL THEIR COMMERCIAL BUSINESS TO STRENGTHEN CHINA’S MILITARY POWER. HE SAYS, “IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY OF MILITARY-CIVILIAN INTEGRATION IS A PREREQUISITE FOR . . . REALIZING THE PARTY’S GOAL OF BUILDING A STRONG MILITARY IN A NEW ERA.”

administration’s seriousness of purpose regarding sensitive trade with potential adversaries.

It is hard to overstate how significant a factor China is to U.S. national security. It is also hard to overstate how important the United States is to Israeli national security. So Israeli officials should ensure that they understand official U.S. thinking about China.

Experts in the Israeli Prime Minister’s office and the Foreign Ministry should brief their colleagues throughout the Israeli government on how U.S. officials interpret and assess China’s strategy, China’s military-civilian fusion policy, the Belt and Road initiative and, in particular, the strategic significance of seaports to Belt and Road.

Chinese operations in Haifa port.

A Chinese-government-owned company – Shanghai International Port Group – has a contract to operate a large

new container facility in Haifa port for 25 years, beginning in 2021. This affects American as well as Israeli security interests.

The site is within a few kilometers of Israel's main naval base. To operate the facility, Shanghai International Port Group will have to connect to all the internet systems of both the harbor and the Ministry of Transportation, exposing them to manipulation, data mining and cyber warfare in the service of Chinese government interests. Given the military and intelligence ties among China, Russia and Iran, the Haifa port arrangements create the risk that China might, under some circumstances, obtain sensitive Israeli naval, merchant shipping and maritime infrastructure information and provide it to Iran. Beyond sensitive information, the aggregation and mining of logistic and commercial information and data is exploitable and commercially, politically and militarily valuable. The long-term presence of a substantial number of Chinese nationals at Haifa will affect the willingness of U.S. Navy officials to make use of Haifa for port calls and other activities.

This issue received much news media and government attention after it was highlighted at our University of Haifa-Hudson Institute workshop in Haifa in August 2018. At the workshop, the criticism of the Haifa port contract with the Chinese company was not that the Israeli government acted foolishly. The point rather was that the West is dealing with an unprecedented challenge from a rising China. The world is learning more year-by-year about China's strategic thinking. More is known now than was known when the Haifa port contract was concluded. The workshop noted that Israeli officials originally approved the SIPG contract without interagency review of its national security implications. A recommendation that emerged from our workshop was that Israel create a mechanism to ensure such review of future foreign investments.

U.S. officials, including Secretary of State Pompeo and the recently departed National Security Adviser Bolton, have now asked that Israel **reexamine the planned Chinese role in Haifa port**. This should be done in light of current information on China's Belt and Road strategy – in particular, China's focus on controlling ports from southeast Asia across the Indian Ocean, through the Red and Mediterranean Seas and around the world. Consideration should be given to China's military-civilian fusion policy and to China's security relations with Russia and Iran.

Among other matters, **the reexamination should address visual, electronic, cyber and other types of surveillance and ways to limit China's intelligence and data collection opportunities. It should consider exposure to**

GIVEN THE INTELLIGENCE TIES AMONG CHINA, RUSSIA AND IRAN, THE HAIFA PORT ARRANGEMENTS CREATE THE RISK THAT CHINA COULD OBTAIN SENSITIVE ISRAELI NAVAL, MERCHANT SHIPPING AND MARITIME INFRASTRUCTURE INFORMATION AND PROVIDE IT TO IRAN.

Chinese political influence and pressure under various circumstances.

Consideration should be given to a range of options, from cancelling the contract to modifying its terms. Israel could ask to shorten the term for operation of the facility from twenty-five years to, perhaps, five or ten years and adopt various risk mitigation measures.

To satisfy U.S. government concerns, it might be useful for Israel to invite the U.S. Navy and other U.S. agencies to consult regarding the risk assessment. The point here is not that Israel lacks its own capabilities, but that Israel has an interest in bolstering U.S. defense officials' confidence that Israel takes the threat seriously and wants to preserve and expand U.S. defense cooperation.

In response to U.S. concerns about Haifa port, Israeli officials have noted that when Israel originally published its tender for the Haifa port expansion, the only firm that bid was SIPG. They say that terminating the contract would be expensive, legally complicated and could kill altogether the plan to expand Haifa's container operations. They worry about the effects on Israel-China trade and investment in general.

The Haifa port issue is only one part of the broad question of how Israel (and the United States and other U.S. allies) should manage its economic and strategic relations with China. It is not necessarily even the most important part, given the gravity

of such issues as 5G infiltration and technology transfer. But the port issue has potential to harm U.S.-Israeli defense relations and it revealed gaps in Israel's strategic and technology review processes. A successful U.S.-Israeli effort to resolve the issue would be a model for how Western allies can constructively manage new China-related challenges.

In all events, Israel would benefit from organizing itself better to deal with such issues. It should establish an official mechanism for advance review of the national security implications of foreign investments. It should also create a board to monitor foreign investments (such as SIPG operations at Haifa port) on an ongoing basis. This is imperative given the amount and sophistication of intellectual property created in Israel, its importance to Israel's security and prosperity, and China's demonstrated predatory practices.

There is no formal Israeli interagency process to review the national security aspects of foreign investment in the Israeli economy. Criteria should be established – for example, investments over a certain size or in certain sectors or in critical infrastructure – for triggering review. The National Security Council should establish the process.

One example of such a process is the U.S. government's Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS). That committee was established in 1975 by presidential executive order. Congress then provided a statutory framework for it in 1988.⁵⁷ The Committee reviews whether proposed foreign investments might cause unacceptable harm to U.S. national security.⁵⁸ It includes representatives of the White House, the State, Defense, Treasury and Justice Departments, the intelligence community and other agencies. The U.S. is in the process of adapting its laws to deal with the dangers of Chinese investment. We cite CFIUS as an example, not because its particular features are suitable for Israel, but because it shows how a formal process can balance commercial interests against national security requirements.

A permanent security oversight board would allow the Israeli government to monitor foreign-entity operations and financing in Israel that could affect national security. The board should comprise government agency representatives with deep technological knowledge. It should have the authority to remedy national security concerns. It would be useful for Haifa port, but its

**HAIFA PORT'S LOGISTIC AND
COMMERCIAL DATA ARE
COMMERCIAL, POLITICALLY
AND MILITARILY EXPLOITABLE BY
CHINA. ISRAEL IS WORKING TO
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THE LONG-TERM PRESENCE OF
CHINESE NATIONALS AT HAIFA
MAY AFFECT THE U.S. NAVY'S
WILLINGNESS TO MAKE USE OF
THE PORT.**

responsibilities should extend to all relevant foreign-entity operations.

If the Chinese project in Haifa port proceeds, commission officials should have ongoing and pervasive access to the Chinese-run facilities. The presence of Israeli monitors would make Chinese intelligence operations at the facility more difficult.

**THE PORT ISSUE HAS REVEALED
GAPS IN ISRAEL'S STRATEGIC AND
TECHNOLOGY REVIEW PROCESSES.**

E. IRAN

Top Iranian government officials think of their country as revolutionary. They take the Islamic Republic's ideology seriously and work to promote it abroad. Shiite clerics loyal to the vision of the regime's founder, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, control the government. Religion is essential to their identity and informs their worldview and national strategy. Their vocabulary reflects this, as when they refer to the United States as the Great Satan and to Israel as the Little Satan. Iranian officials for many years have called for "Death to America" and promised to annihilate Israel.⁶⁹

Iran's nuclear program has dominated the attention of U.S. officials for much of the last decade. Meanwhile the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps entrenched its soldiers, trained proxies and exported its revolutionary ideology in key strategic positions across the Middle East.

Iran is working to create two major elements of strategic architecture. The northern element is a land bridge to connect Iran – through Iraq, Syria and Lebanon – to the Mediterranean.⁶⁰ Securing such a bridge would facilitate Iran's arming and supplying of Hezbollah. It would enable Iran to threaten Israel not only through Hezbollah across the Lebanese border, but directly across the Syrian border. It would increase Iran's military influence in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. It would allow Iran to threaten its enemies in the Eastern Mediterranean and create overland supply lines to Iran from the Mediterranean for use in emergencies – e.g., if the Hormuz Strait were blocked.

The southern element of Iran's new strategic architecture is a maritime route from the Persian Gulf across the Arabian Sea and Gulf of Aden to the Red Sea, Suez Canal and Mediterranean.

In recent months, tensions between Iran and the United States have become inflamed. Not crediting Iran's promises in the 2015 nuclear deal, President Trump withdrew from it in May 2018 and imposed unilateral U.S. economic sanctions on Iran. In April 2019,⁶¹ he designated the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) a foreign terrorist organization.⁶² Two weeks later, he announced he would further curtail Iranian oil exports by not reissuing various oil-purchase waivers.⁶³

President Trump's "maximum pressure" has been effective in cutting Iran's oil exports far beyond what many analysts thought was possible through *unilateral* U.S. sanctions. Iran's oil exports have fallen to 0.5 million barrels per day (mbd) from 2.9 mbd in 2016.⁶⁴ As a result, the value of Iran's currency has plummeted

IRAN IS ESTABLISHING A LAND BRIDGE TO CONNECT IT TO THE MEDITERRANEAN THROUGH IRAQ, SYRIA AND LEBANON, AND A MARITIME ROUTE FROM THE PERSIAN GULF ACROSS THE ARABIAN SEA AND GULF OF ADEN TO THE RED SEA, SUEZ CANAL AND MEDITERRANEAN.

and Iran has had to slash its subsidies to Hezbollah and reduce its own domestic budget.⁶⁵

In December 2018, Iranian President Rouhani threatened to respond to this economic pressure by blockading the Hormuz Strait.⁶⁶ The threat was repeated in April 2019 by the chief of the IRGC navy, which threatens vital infrastructure in the Gulf region and challenges U.S. and allied forces operating there.⁶⁷

On May 5, the United States sent an aircraft carrier strike group to the region in response to intelligence reports of Iranian threats.⁶⁸ On May 12, four oil tankers were attacked in the Gulf of Oman; U.S. officials said Iran was responsible.⁶⁹ On May 14, Saudi oil facilities were attacked. Though Houthis originally claimed responsibility, U.S. officials have said the attackers were Iranian-back Iraqi forces.⁷⁰ On May 24, President Trump sent 1,500 U.S. troops to the Middle East for force protection.⁷¹ On June 13, mines damaged Norwegian and Japanese oil tankers in the Gulf of Oman and U.S. officials, blaming Iran, announced the deployment of another 1,000 U.S. troops to the region.⁷²

A week later, an Iranian missile shot down a U.S. surveillance drone over international waters in the Hormuz Strait.⁷³ After ordering a retaliatory strike, President Trump called it off,

explaining that the likely Iranian fatalities were not “proportionate” to Iran’s offense against the unmanned aircraft.⁷⁴ He is inviting Iran to negotiate with the United States, but has warned that further attacks against American targets would trigger a devastating response.⁷⁵

On July 1, Iran’s foreign minister announced that his country has responded to U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear deal by breaking the deal’s limit on the quantity of low-enriched uranium.⁷⁶ A week later, another Iranian official announced that Iran broke the qualitative limit on uranium, enriching above the 3.67% level.⁷⁷ Citing statements by the head of Iran’s nuclear agency, the *Washington Post* reports that Iran has enriched 24 metric tons of uranium since making the nuclear deal, which suggests that Iran has produced far more than previously known and has “exceeded the deal’s limit many times over.”⁷⁸

President Trump has exhorted U.S. allies to protect their own interests against Iran.

On July 4, British Royal Marines seized near Gibraltar an Iranian oil tanker suspected of violating European Union sanctions against Syria. Days later, three Iranian ships tried to block the passage of a British oil tanker in the Persian Gulf, and a British Royal Navy frigate forced the Iranians to back down.⁷⁹ Britain then announced the dispatch of an additional destroyer to the Persian Gulf.⁸⁰ On July 19, before the second British warship arrived in the Gulf, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Navy there seized a British-flagged oil tanker and harassed a second tanker with British connections.⁸¹ In early August, Britain announced it was joining the United States in an international effort to protect Persian Gulf shipping.⁸² Israel’s foreign minister said Israel is “involved” in that effort, including through provision of intelligence.⁸³ Later in August, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said his government decided to join the U.S.-led coalition to protect shipping in the Strait of Hormuz.⁸⁴

President Trump has said his goal in the Islamic Republic is not regime change, but preventing the country from ever obtaining a nuclear weapon. Through his maximum pressure policy, he appears to be trying to compel Iran to negotiate a new and (from his point of view) better nuclear deal. Iranian officials say they will not give in. If they don’t and if the sanctions continue to damage Iran’s economy and shrink its oil exports, Iran could face the kind of political instability that recently afflicted Venezuela as a result of its economic collapse. If the regime’s survival is endangered, Iran may blockade the Hormuz Strait, attack Israel either directly or through proxies or otherwise start a terrorist campaign or war in the hope that the violence may generate multilateral diplomacy to rescue it from U.S. sanctions.

IF THE IRANIAN REGIME’S SURVIVAL IS ENDANGERED, IRAN MAY BLOCKADE THE HORMUZ STRAIT, ATTACK ISRAEL, OR START A TERRORIST CAMPAIGN OR WAR IN THE HOPE THAT THE VIOLENCE MAY GENERATE MULTILATERAL DIPLOMACY TO RESCUE IT FROM U.S. SANCTIONS.

Iran threatens the national security interests of the United States, Israel and others in various ways, but its nuclear weapons program is of paramount significance and has been a key concern of U.S. and Israeli officials for much of the last decade. The 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – the so-called Iran nuclear deal – imposed limits on Iranian nuclear activity for a period of time and ended UN economic sanctions against Iran. It did *not* constrain Iran’s missile program, support for terrorism, support for Syria’s Assad regime or calls for the destruction of America and Israel. President Trump terminated U.S. participation in the JCPOA on May 8, 2018.⁸⁵

The strategic importance of Iran’s nuclear ambitions is not just how possession of nuclear weapons might affect Iran’s actions, although that’s a serious problem. Iran’s nuclear ambitions undermine the world’s non-proliferation architecture.

Whatever ultimately becomes of the JCPOA, there is danger that Iran’s pursuit of nuclear weapons will trigger cascading proliferation in the Middle East and beyond. Saudi officials have said their country will demand a nuclear weapon of its own.⁸⁶ Similar demands could arise in Turkey, Egypt and other Gulf states. Such proliferation would increase the dangers of nuclear war in the world and the ill consequences would not be confined to the Middle East.

Iran has been militarily active throughout the Middle East in recent years, in the Persian Gulf, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen. Current Persian Gulf tensions have recent precedents. The IRGC Navy harassed the U.S. Navy in the Persian Gulf in 2016 and 2017.

Iran invested heavily, financially and militarily, in the survival of Bashar al-Assad's regime. Large numbers of IRGC soldiers fought in the Syrian civil war and provided training and support to Assad's forces. Assad's success is a strategic victory for Iran as well as Russia. Iran now seeks to capitalize on that victory by entrenching its presence in Syria, which has just granted Iran the right to manage the Mediterranean port of Latakia.⁸⁷ Iranian forces are also trying to establish in Syria a capability to threaten Israel directly across the Syrian border. Israel has conducted numerous military strikes to prevent this.⁸⁸

In Yemen, Iran is supporting the Shiite Houthi rebels. Saudi Arabia is supporting the Yemeni government. An important aspect of the Yemeni civil war is control of seaports. Iran is using ships to deliver supplies to their proxies in Yemen the Houthi rebellion, either directly or via Somalia, despite coalition efforts to intercept shipments. In January 2018, Houthi rebels threatened to block shipping through the Red Sea. Iran has also threatened to use the Houthis to harm Israeli merchant ships in the straits of Bab Al-Mandab between East Africa and Yemen.

Iran may attempt to use naval bases in Syria and Yemen to project power into the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, as was recently advocated by General Baqeri, Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces. Iran recognizes the Red Sea as a strategic area of interest because of its desire to gain control over the main maritime oil and gas choke points to the West.

Saudi Arabia, other Gulf Arab states, Egypt, Israel and the United States oppose the efforts of Iran to increase the power and range of its influence. Iranian presence and activities in Syria and South Yemen are threats to Israel. An important aspect of those threats is the potential for greater hostile activity by Iranian naval forces based in Syrian ports or in the southern Red Sea.

Iranian strategy is multifaceted. In addition to its nuclear program, naval activity in the Persian Gulf and military interventions in Syria and Yemen, it includes political subversion. Through monetary payments, infiltration of agents and other means, Iran wins loyalty and promotes unrest among Iraqi Shiites and Shiite minorities in the Arabian Peninsula's Sunni-ruled states.

Israel reportedly has conducted air attacks against Iranian assets in Iraq. These include sites believed to be part of an

THE IRAN NUCLEAR ISSUE IS NOT JUST ABOUT HOW POSSESSION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS MIGHT AFFECT IRAN'S ACTIONS. IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM IS UNDERMINING THE WORLD'S NON-PROLIFERATION ARCHITECTURE.

Iranian military supply operation for Syria and bases for Iranian-backed Iraqi militias.⁸⁹ The Israeli Defense Force's Chief of Staff announced that Israel preempted in Syria a planned Iranian drone strike against Israel that was personally overseen by the commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps' Quds Force.⁹⁰

Iranian strategy relies heavily on proxy forces. Iran created Hezbollah in the early 1980s and the group serves today as its most capable proxy. It has become a powerful political party in Lebanon with substantial electoral support among Lebanese Shiites and cooperates closely with elements of Lebanon's Christian political leadership. Hezbollah threatens Israel from Lebanon with an estimated 150,000 surface-to-surface rockets. It also casts a cloud over shipping in the Eastern Mediterranean. In 2006 Hezbollah damaged an Israeli navy ship with a Chinese-made missile and has been reported to have Russian-made anti-ship missiles that can hit Israeli ships and Israel's offshore natural gas facilities in the Mediterranean.

Iran uses Palestinian Islamic Jihad and sometimes Hamas as proxies against Israel. Despite its political failures and poor economic performance in Gaza, Hamas continues to threaten Israel with rockets, incendiary kites and tunnels for terrorist infiltration.

Responses to Iran's strategy. Through economic sanctions directed especially against the banking and energy sectors, pressure on Iran can be increased to limit its aggressive capabilities.

More assertive use of cyber and economic sanctions can create opportunities to disrupt Iran's funding of the IRGC, Hezbollah and other terrorist organizations in the region.

Sanctions can be intensified against banking institutions and individuals involved in movement of funds. Sanctions and cyber activities can be aimed at IRGC activities involving the shipping, transport, and storage of weapons, supplies and materials in the region. Similarly, the personal finances of Iranian leaders can be targeted.

The Iran problem is not confined to nuclear weapons. Given the regime's ideology and nature, the Iranian threat can be expected to grow while that regime remains in power. There is a possibility, however remote, that the regime's domestic opponents will remove the regime.

Its leaders, after all, are unpopular at home, widely recognized as corrupt, disdained as hypocritical, resented as oppressive, scorned for their economic failures and condemned for their expensive foreign adventures. A new Iranian revolution does not appear imminent and may not occur at all. Any Israeli or U.S. efforts to encourage Iran's domestic opposition to the regime should avoid compromising the opposition's independence and integrity.

Meanwhile, as noted, President Trump, says he is "not looking for regime change."¹ He may agree to meet with Iranian President Rouhani at the United Nations this September 2019. **The main policy changes U.S. officials should press Iran for are terminating its nuclear weapons program, ending its support for terrorism and complying with the United Nations Security Council resolutions on its ballistic missile program.**

Military pressure can be intensified against Iran in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. The United States could warn that, if Iran renews provocations in the Persian Gulf it will be putting at risk its main naval facilities at Bandar Abbas. **The United States could help Israel to deter Iran and U.S. and Israeli civilian and military officials should consult and coordinate to that end.**

Though President Trump has declared his desire to diminish the U.S. military presence in the Middle East, Iranian activities create countervailing pressures. Iran continually flexes its power, especially in the Persian Gulf, North Arabian Sea and episodically in the Red Sea. **This impels U.S. officials to maintain support agreements in the area and have forces**

**RUSSIA AND CHINA COOPERATE
MILITARILY THROUGH ARMS
SALES, COMBINED EXERCISES
AND DEFENSE CONSULTATIONS.
IN THE EASTERN
MEDITERRANEAN, THEIR
INTERESTS LARGELY ALIGN.**

ready, trained, and routinely exercised in responding to threatening Iranian declarations and actions. U.S. response options necessarily deal with a range of contingencies, from small provocations to substantial combat operations in the Gulf and its approaches.

In addition to pure military response options, greater efforts should be made to ensure effective U.S. broadcast and internet programming directed at Iran.

Russia, Iran and China each by itself poses for the United States and Israel security challenges, actual and potential. Cooperation among these three powers greatly increases the danger. Each is run by an authoritarian anti-democratic regime that embodies and preaches hostility to the United States and the West.

The relationship between Russia and China is strained in some areas, but cooperative in others. In military matters – for example, arms sales, combined exercises and defense consultations – it has grown closer. In the Eastern Mediterranean, their interests largely align. Both countries oppose U.S. diplomatic influence, reject American liberal and democratic principles, desire to counter American military power and seek to weaken and ultimately fracture America's network of defense alliances and partnerships. They have worked together against American and Western interests worldwide, supporting the Iranian regime, the Syrian regime and Venezuela's Maduro regime.

Crimea's Russia-backed government "offered Iran access to its ports as a way for Tehran to avoid Western sanctions on oil exports," according to the *Moscow Times*.⁹² And Reuters reports that Iran's foreign minister has announced that Russia and Iran are planning to hold combined naval exercises in the Indian Ocean.⁹³

As Russia, Iran and China collect intelligence against the United States, Israel or other Western states, it must be assumed that information is shared by each with the other two.

F. SYRIA

The Trump administration has delivered mixed messages about its objectives in Syria. The president stresses his desire to withdraw U.S. forces from Syria and speaks disapprovingly in principle of long-term commitments of U.S. troops in the Middle East.⁹⁴ On December 20, 2018, Mr. Trump tweeted, "Does the USA want to be the Policeman of the Middle East, doing nothing but spending precious lives and trillions of dollars protecting others who, in almost all cases, do not appreciate what we are doing? Do we want to be there forever? Time for others to finally fight. . . ."⁹⁵ Other senior administration officials, however, have highlighted other U.S. interests in Syria, such as opposing Iran's military entrenchment, protecting the security of Syrian Kurds who assisted U.S. efforts against ISIS and establishing conditions that would help preclude a reemergence of ISIS.⁹⁶ Secretary of State Pompeo said in late August 2019 that while the ISIS-created caliphate has disappeared, "there are certainly places where ISIS is more powerful today than they were three or four years ago."⁹⁷

The president announced on December 19, 2018 that the force of approximately 2000 U.S. troops in Syria would withdraw promptly. His Secretary of State and National Security Adviser have since made public statements suggesting that the withdrawal will not take place quickly or unconditionally.⁹⁸

The president has said ISIS is largely eliminated in Syria and he would welcome Turkish and Russian military efforts there against what remains of that terrorist organization.⁹⁹

Turkey's defense minister threatened Kurdish forces in Syria immediately after President Trump announced that U.S. troops would soon be withdrawn from Syria.¹⁰⁰ If Turkish forces attack Syrian Kurds recently allied with U.S. anti-ISIS efforts, it will damage American credibility. In August, U.S. and Turkish officials announced they would work together to create "safe zone" in northern Syria that would effectively head off a Turkish

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military offensive against a Syrian Kurdish force that the United States supports.¹⁰¹

Russia appears committed to retaining substantial military assets in Syria. Its entrenchment there affords President Putin influence in the Eastern Mediterranean region, which he can use to promote or counter Iranian interests in Syria, constrain Israeli military operations, shape events region-wide, including in NATO's southern flank and generally counter American interests.

The West has no interest in Syria's becoming even more a puppet state of Russia or Iran. Israel has repeatedly attacked Iranian forces that were trying to establish bases in Syria capable of threatening Israel. According to Lieutenant General Gadi Eisenkot, former Chief of Staff of the Israeli Defense Forces, the Iranians' "vision was to have significant influence in Syria by building a force of up to 100,000 Shiite fighters from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq." He added, "They built intelligence bases and an air force base within each Syrian air base. And they brought civilians in order to indoctrinate them."¹⁰² **It would serve U.S. and Israeli interests if Syria's leadership were not beholden to Iran and Russia.**

Working with allies and partners, some U.S. officials would like to create incentives for Russia to remove the S-300 air defense system from Syria and close down Russia's airbase and naval base in Syria and for Russia and Iran to remove all their forces from Syria, especially as the ostensible purpose of the deployment to Syria – ending the ISIS caliphate – has been

achieved. At the moment, this appears to be unrealistic. The United States does not have the power in the region, the overall military capability or the commitment from President Trump to press Russia forcefully to withdraw from Syria.

Syria is a key component of Iranian strategy. Iran has tested its own fighting forces there, and those of its Hezbollah proxies. It played a crucial role in preserving the Assad regime. It is aiming to create in Syria instruments of power similar to those it created in Lebanon: Shiite militias, other proxy forces and local pro-Iranian civic and humanitarian groups. **U.S. officials from the president on down should consider and talk publicly of Iranian strategy in Syria. Syria's importance is more than the tragic humanitarian problems and the ISIS presence there.**

As Israel conducts military operations to force Iran to withdraw its forces from Syria, U.S. officials should warn Russia that they will consider it a hostile act if the S-300 locks on to a U.S. aircraft, and will assist Israel to counter S-300 threats against Israeli aircraft.

It is hard to overstate the devastation that the civil war has caused throughout Syria. It has inflamed Syria's relations with all its neighbors and all the internal fault lines within the country, between Arabs and Kurds and among Sunnis, Shiites, Alawites and others.

British and French officials invented the Syrian state after World War I.¹⁰³ It is unclear whether Syria after its civil war will be able to retain the borders drawn after World War I. Turks, Kurds, Lebanese, Iraqis and Israelis – let alone Russians and Americans – may all in time want adjustments made. President Trump has already announced that the United States recognizes Israel as sovereign in the Golan Heights, the territory Syria lost to Israel in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. There are conflicting views as to whether the president's announcement hurts or improves chances for an eventual Syrian-Israeli peace deal. In any event, it should be anticipated that various parties will pressure the Assad regime to accept border changes, grant additional basing rights to foreign powers and make other concessions.

G. THE SUNNI-SHIITE FAULT LINE

For the Muslim countries in the Eastern Mediterranean region, the most important strategic reality is the Sunni-Shiite fault line – that is, the Shiite Iranian threat, chiefly opposed by Sunni Saudi Arabia. Officials in the region tend to view all national security

**SAUDI LEADERS AND THEIR
SUNNI REGIONAL ALLIES SEE
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ECONOMIC MATTERS.**

affairs with reference to that fault line. This is similar to the way American and Soviet officials tended to view all national security affairs with reference to the East-West fault line during the Cold War.

There are exceptions. In the Iran vs. Saudi conflict the leaders of Qatar, Turkey and the Muslim Brotherhood organization, though all are Sunnis, tend to side with Iran against Saudi Arabia. (A sign of the maddening complexity of Middle Eastern politics is that Qatar, despite its friendliness with Iran, cooperates with Israel to provide cash to Gaza. Israel has allowed the aid on humanitarian grounds despite the political benefits the cash produces for Hamas.)

Saudi leaders and their Sunni regional allies see wars and instability in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen as manifestations of the Iranian threat. They likewise see Iran as the source of political subversion there and among the Shiite minority populations throughout the Persian Gulf region. The result is that other conflicts and interests – including anti-Zionism – are being subordinated to the fight against Iran. Increasingly, leaders of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states openly show their interest in cooperating with Israel on security and economic matters.

Between those states and Israel, there have lately been a number of remarkable examples of open normalization: Saudi overflight permission for Air India planes heading to and from Israel; Netanyahu's publicized visit to Oman; Israeli government ministers' open visit to sports events in Gulf; public statements by Saudi and Bahraini officials about Israel's right to exist and to defend itself; and participation of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and other Arab parties in the Trump administration's Peace-to-Prosperty Workshop in Bahrain.

U.S. and Israeli officials should coordinate initiatives to further improve Israeli ties with Saudi Arabia and other neighboring Arab states. Covert ties have value, but open ties are especially important. Israel's open acceptance by its Arab neighbors as a permanent state and security partner can contribute to Palestinian-Israeli peace and counter the notion that persistent Palestinian hostility will isolate Israel and may eventually drive the Jews out.

A prominent Saudi prince, in a recent interview with an Israeli television journalist, said that Prime Minister Netanyahu would like to have a relationship with Saudi Arabia "and then we can fix the Palestinian issue." But from the Saudi point of view, the prince added, "it's the other way around."¹⁰⁴ The background to this statement is the aforementioned list of private and official steps in recent years toward "normalization" of relations between Israel and Gulf Arab states, including Saudi Arabia, despite no progress whatever toward a peace between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. It is debatable whether Prince Turki's statement should be taken at face value or interpreted as lip service to the Palestinian cause.

Consideration should be given to joint projects between Israel and its Arab neighbor states regarding Red Sea maritime security and a broad maritime agenda, including cooperation on energy technology, maritime research, aquaculture and environmental protection. Information exchanges should be held that provide greater safety at sea (weather forecasting, navigational aids, etc.). Other joint projects could aim to counter Islamist extremist ideology, alleviate humanitarian distress among Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, bolster Jordan's economy, promote sports competitions or take advantage of Israeli technologies regarding water recycling or cyber defense.

H. TURKEY

Turkey is a wild card in the Eastern Mediterranean. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is literally reorienting his country, pointing

it strategically eastward and turning it away from the West and from the NATO alliance. A sign is Erdogan's purchase from Russia of the S-400 air defense system. U.S. officials warned Turkey that taking delivery would require Turkey's exclusion from the F-35 aircraft program – a notable rebuke as Turkey's \$195 million contribution to the F-35's development costs once entitled it to early delivery of the plane. Russia is producing the S-400, an advanced air defense system intended to shoot down advanced U.S. aircraft like the F-35. Turkey defied the warnings, however, and the United States has now cancelled F-35 shipments to it and expelled it from the F-35 production program.¹⁰⁵

Turkey's longstanding dispute with Cyprus and Greece has recently acquired a significant maritime element, namely the delimitation of Cyprus's Exclusive Economic Zone which is rich in hydrocarbons. Turkey opposes efforts by Cyprus to conduct oil and gas exploration in disputed waters. In February 2018, Turkish forces blocked an Italian drillship from operating in Cypriot waters.¹⁰⁶ In July 2019, the E.U. announced a plan to suspend over \$100 million in financial aid and downgrade relations with Turkey after Turkish vessels twice drilled in Cyprus's Exclusive Economic Zone.¹⁰⁷ There is danger that the Turkish navy could intervene against Exxon's exploration vessels in the area.

Erdogan has threatened military action against Cyprus over its claim to the gas in its EEZ.¹⁰⁸ **U.S. officials should back Cyprus, Greece and Israel in rejecting this threat.** Israeli forces regularly hold combined military exercises with Cypriot forces,¹⁰⁹ and Israel now conducts such exercises with Greece, the U.S. and others.¹¹⁰ **Expanding the scope of combined exercises could help deter Turkey as its leaders consider increasing pressure on Cypriot gas exploration and export.**

Erdogan leads an Islamist political party. He has effectively repudiated Ataturk's 1923 revolution, which aimed to transform Turkey from an oriental empire headed by a sultan who was also the Caliph of Islam to a liberal, secular democratic nation-state.¹¹¹ Erdogan has systematically dismantled key liberal and democratic Turkish institutions and notoriously jailed large numbers of journalists, more than in any other country of the world.¹¹² Erdogan's counter-revolution is a challenge for NATO. If Turkey were applying now for NATO membership, its lack of civil liberties and other anti-democratic features would make it ineligible.

For the time being, U.S. officials are not working to expel Turkey from NATO. The alliance does not have a mechanism for ousting members. In any event, there is an argument that Turkey

should not be equated with Erdogan. If and when Erdogan ceases to rule, Turkey can return to good standing in NATO. Meanwhile, **the United States and other NATO members have to improvise ways to manage the risks involved with Turkey's remaining in the alliance.**

President Trump has said he is relying on Turkey to fight ISIS in Syria. U.S. officials have made inconsistent statements as to whether the U.S. government supports Turkey's military actions in Syria. Turkey has become more aggressive toward many of its neighbors and toward the United States.¹¹⁵

In addition to aligning itself with Russia at the expense of relations with Europe and the U.S., Turkey initially opposed U.S. requests to its allies to stop importing Iranian crude oil but has since come into line.¹¹⁶ Turkey is also developing a base in Doha, Qatar, a move that other Gulf States deem hostile.¹¹⁷ (Qatar supports the Muslim Brotherhood and opposes the anti-Iran policies of Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf Arab Sunni leaders.)¹¹⁸

After the July 2016 anti-Erdogan coup attempt, Turkish authorities arrested nearly two dozen American citizens and three Turkish employees of U.S. diplomatic offices and charged them with terrorism or involvement in the coup. To protest the arrest of an American Christian pastor, U.S. officials threatened economic sanctions against Turkey in August 2018.¹¹⁹ Qatar pledged \$15 billion worth of investment in Turkey to limit the impact of the threatened U.S. sanctions. (Turkey eventually released the pastor.)¹²⁰

Erdogan supports attacks by Hamas against Israel. He routinely denounces Israel in antisemitic terms.¹²¹ Yet, Turkish-Israeli trade and tourism remain strong. Trade between the two states increased by \$130 million in the first quarter of 2019.¹²² Israeli travel to Turkey in 2018 was 16% higher than in the previous year.¹²³

Turkey's power and general importance in the region, its process of reorienting to the east, its drift away from NATO and democratic norms and disruptive regional activity demand close policy coordination between the United States and Israel.

I. GAZA

There is debate in Israel as to whether allowing creation of a seaport in Gaza would be a net benefit to Israel and to Gaza's inhabitants.

TURKEY HAS BECOME MORE AGGRESSIVE TOWARD MANY OF ITS NEIGHBORS AND TOWARD THE UNITED STATES.

Proponents of the seaport argue that it would be a source of revenue for private businesses and for Gaza's government. If large enough, these revenues could reduce Gaza's dependence on aid, which could reduce Iran's influence. Because the seaport could operate only if Israel lifted its blockade, the threat to reimpose the blockade could give Israel leverage with the Gaza authorities. Proponents also say that Israel's blockade of Gaza, however justified by security concerns, generates anti-Israel antagonism around the world and allowing a seaport could diminish such antagonism.

Given the hostility of Hamas, which runs Gaza, the dangers to Israel of a Gaza seaport are obvious. The question is whether arrangements could be made to reduce those dangers satisfactorily. Proponents of the seaport say they can see diplomatic advantages for Israel in trying to negotiate such arrangements.

Israel's army, Transportation Ministry and other agencies have studied various options. Some involve Israeli inspection of goods in Cyprus before they depart for Gaza. Others involve use of an artificial island. Some involve inspections in which Egypt and the Palestinian Authority would participate. Suggestions have been

THE DANGERS TO ISRAEL OF A GAZA SEAPORT ARE OBVIOUS. THE QUESTION IS WHETHER ARRANGEMENTS COULD BE MADE TO REDUCE THOSE DANGERS SATISFACTORILY.

made that Israel could consent to a Gaza seaport in return for a ceasefire arrangement of long duration.

Skeptics question whether Hamas would ever actually relinquish power in Gaza to make such arrangements workable. They question whether Hamas, if it promised to abide by security arrangements for Israel's benefit, would keep its word. There is, after all, a long, consistent and sobering history over the last century of non-democratic actors entering into peace and arms control agreements with democratic parties, then violating those agreements. The democratic parties time and again have found themselves without good options for responding to the violations. So-called guarantees from outside powers have rarely if ever produced action (let alone effective action) to enforce such agreements.

Nevertheless, many Israelis argue that further Israeli action is required to help relieve the grievous humanitarian distress of many of Gaza's inhabitants. Israelis across a wide stretch of the political spectrum incline toward that view notwithstanding that it is Hamas that is chiefly responsible for the suffering and Israel is already providing Gaza with electricity, food, building supplies and other resources.

Some Israelis propose that efforts to provide a better life for the people of Gaza should focus on economic development not in Gaza itself, where Hamas can exploit or block progress, but in northern Sinai, which is Egyptian territory. There, the Egyptian authorities could protect investments in energy, manufacturing and other facilities. They have many incentives to do so, including their interest in strengthening their hold on the Sinai to counter the Islamist extremist groups that are present there and challenging the authority of the Egyptian government.

The economic development of northeastern Sinai could create job and trade opportunities for the people of Gaza. Hamas might try to block them, but if Sinai economic development succeeds, Hamas might find it difficult to deny its people the chance to benefit from business with fellow Arabs across the Egyptian border.

Hamas is the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. It is committed in its charter document, written in 1988, to Israel's destruction. It continually wages war against Israel through terrorist means. It fires rockets into Israeli towns, kidnaps Israelis, constructs concrete tunnels for terrorist infiltration, attacks from the sea and sends incendiary kites to burn Israeli farms.

**OVER THE LAST CENTURY,
NUMEROUS NON-DEMOCRATIC
ACTORS HAVE ENTERED INTO
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AGREEMENTS WITH DEMOCRATIC
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VIOLATED THOSE AGREEMENTS.
DEMOCRATIC PARTIES FIND
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FROM OUTSIDE POWERS HAVE
RARELY BEEN EFFECTIVE.**

Hamas is hostile not only to Israel, but also to Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Egypt and Israel are both blockading Gaza to prevent arms and military supplies from being smuggled in or out.

Unemployment in Gaza is high (52%) and most of the employed inhabitants (approximately 55%, as of 2014) work for the local authorities. Aside from government payments there is little economic activity. Because of endemic violence and corruption there is virtually no foreign investment.

Gaza receives foreign aid but Hamas has used much of it not for humanitarian purposes but to build the costly terrorist tunnels and to buy arms.

The Palestinian Authority and Hamas continue to fight (sometimes violently) over governance, payment of government employees, and provision of electricity and other resources. Their disputes aggravate local economic distress.

Some Israelis believe their government should work to help the Ramallah (West Bank)-based Palestinian Authority reestablish authority over Gaza, replacing Hamas. Others believe otherwise; some arguing that Israel should do nothing to bolster the Palestinian Authority.

J. ISIS

Whether ISIS will cease to exist or morph into another organization or two is unknown. In any case, new jihadist movements preaching and practicing terrorist violence will likely arise. Iran, Russia and Turkey all use ISIS's presence in Syria to justify their military operations there.

The United States and Israel share interests in discerning organizational changes within the network of jihadist movements and uncovering their recruiting strategies, susceptible candidates and operational tactics. The next jihadist organizers, commanders and operatives can be expected to learn from the past to avoid the vulnerabilities of al-Qaeda, ISIS and others.

As noted previously, **U.S. and Israeli cooperation may be possible with Sunni Arab governments – in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and elsewhere – against radical Islamist groups. Particular attention should be paid to how jihadists recruit and indoctrinate.** That is part of the broader question of how the West should counter ideological support for jihadist organizations. This has been a deficiency of the war on terrorism since 2001. It is an ongoing major mistake by the United States, Israel and other Western powers to fail to organize serious efforts to negate the ideological appeal of the jihadists.

The United States could benefit from basing a small contingent of U.S. special operations forces in Israel to increase interoperability with Israel's special operators. It could facilitate the swift introduction of larger U.S. units to conduct counter-terrorist operations, if and when necessary.

U.S. and Israeli analysts should work together to use artificial intelligence to get ahead of the security challenges jihadist groups will pose.

Discussions of security applications of artificial intelligence (AI) often deal with speed of decision making, control of

AN ONGOING MISTAKE OF THE UNITED STATES, ISRAEL AND OTHER WESTERN POWERS IS THEIR FAILURE TO ORGANIZE SERIOUS EFFORTS TO COUNTER THE IDEOLOGICAL APPEAL OF JIHADISM.

autonomous systems, and coordinating multiple weapons and delivery platforms. **U.S. and Israeli innovators, however, should pursue using AI to synthesize local and regional news, social media, blogs, podcasts, etc. to anticipate jihadist strategies, recruitment efforts and operations.**

As Israeli maritime interests and infrastructure grow they are sure to be considered as targets by state and non-state adversaries. Accordingly, Israel will have to adapt its view of its maritime domain. That view has been coastal and security-focused. In the future, it will have to account for a variety of security and economic activities in a much larger sea area. Israel will also have to consider the changing technology that threatens its interests and the utility of new technology to defend its maritime space and interests.

Adapting to changes of this kind is difficult. There are always forces, especially in government bureaucracies, that are retrospective by nature and reluctant to adjust to future requirements. Israel, however, is famously innovative. It should capitalize on its innovation base and boldly restructure maritime domain awareness organizations and concepts. It can overcome technical, policy and cultural inertia and employ advanced data fusion concepts and technologies, artificial intelligence and unmanned autonomous systems to sense and respond to developments in its exclusive economic zone.

K. NATURAL GAS

Israel's export plans. Proposals are under consideration for transporting Israeli natural gas to Europe. Some in Israel favor the idea because it could contribute to Israel's economic

strength, encourage and enable further investment in development of Israeli offshore oil and gas and reduce Europe's dependence on Russia natural gas. Others oppose it, saying that the Israeli government and the gas companies should focus on developing the local and regional gas sector rather than searching for distant export markets.

Israel, Cyprus and Greece agreed in December to collaborate on an "Eastmed" pipeline to transport Israeli gas to Europe through Cyprus, Greece and Italy. It would be the world's deepest and longest pipeline.¹²⁵ It is not clear that it can attract the necessary investment of an estimated \$6-7 billion.¹²⁶ It would be more economical to export Israeli gas to Europe via Turkey, but the hostility of Turkish President Erdogan has killed that idea, at least for now.

By attending the Greek-Cypriot-Israeli summit in March 2019, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo demonstrated U.S.

support for economic and strategic cooperation among the three nations.¹²⁷ Egypt plans to begin importing Israeli gas by the end of this year.¹²⁸

Lebanon maritime boundary dispute. Israel and Lebanon have competing claims to 330 square miles that may be rich in hydrocarbon resources where their claimed Exclusive Economic Zones overlap. This dispute could make the Eastern Mediterranean an arena for violent conflict between Israel and Hezbollah.

The dispute has produced years of brinkmanship. U.S. back-channel mediation has created prospects of a partial deal that might be acceptable to both sides. But, according to press reports, talks failed in July over Lebanon's insistence that further negotiations continue under U.N. sponsorship and also include the Lebanese-Israeli land border.¹²⁹



IV. THE U.S. DEFENSE POSTURE AND U.S.-ISRAELI DEFENSE COOPERATION

To recap: The Eastern Mediterranean is important to U.S. strategic interests, though successive U.S. administrations lately have created a power vacuum in the region. States adverse to U.S. interests – Russia and Iran, in particular – have exploited this vacuum, increasing their military capabilities and influence. China, too, sees the region’s strategic importance as evidenced by its Djibouti military base and its contracts to build, operate and own ports across the region. Israel is the local power with the greatest military and intelligence capabilities. Given America’s regional strategic interests, constraints on U.S. defense spending, U.S. officials’ intent to minimize U.S. military presence in the Middle East and President Trump’s insistence that allies should do more to defend alliance interests, there is an opportunity for the United States and Israel to increase mutual defense cooperation. Both countries would gain from such cooperation. A process of identifying impediments to a closer strategic partnership and deciding what it would take to remove them could produce a way forward toward a more secure, peaceful and prosperous region.

A. SHOULD ISRAEL AND THE U.S. CONCLUDE A MUTUAL DEFENSE TREATY?

Prime Minister Netanyahu has privately floated a proposal for a U.S.-Israeli defense treaty. Whether it is serious or merely preparation for a politically valuable announcement before the upcoming Israeli elections is unclear. In any case, a few observations are in order.

The United States has entered into various kinds of defense treaties. The treaty on which NATO is built has the most far-reaching mutual defense commitment – an attack against one party will be considered an attack against all the parties. Other U.S. defense treaties require little more than mutual consultations in the event of an attack against a party.

U.S. Navy sailors aboard the USS Higgins (DDG 76) destroyer on October 29, 2009 in Haifa, Israel participating in the Israeli-U.S. ‘Juniper Cobra’ training exercise. (Atef Safadi-Pool/Getty Images)

U.S. and Israeli officials have long refrained from negotiating a mutual defense treaty because it was judged unnecessary and potentially harmful to both countries. Israeli officials worried mainly about Israel's freedom of action; they did not want a duty to ask U.S. permission before acting to defend their state. U.S. officials have not wanted to have to grant or deny such permission – or to “own” all Israeli military operations. On a number of occasions, U.S. officials have been pleased that when Israel took tough and risky military actions – e.g., against Iraq's nuclear reactor in 1981, terrorist leaders or operatives during the second intifada and Syria's nuclear reactor in 2007 – the United States could renounce any responsibility but (if the actions were successful) benefit nonetheless.

It is not at all clear that it would be a net plus for the United States and Israel to enter into a mutual defense treaty. Current defense cooperation does not require one, nor is one necessary to allow additional cooperation.

As a practical matter, the help that the United States would give Israel (or Israel would give the United States) in a crisis should not be expected to increase as a result of a mutual defense treaty. Such help is provided when the countries' leaders decide, at the time, that it is in their nation's interest to provide it, and not otherwise. The United States resupplied Israel during the 1973 Yom Kippur War even though it had no treaty obligation to do so. Israel helped the United States in Jordan in 1970 even though it had no treaty obligation to do so. And Israel and the United States gave each other substantial defense-related help after the 9/11 attack in 2001 absent a treaty.

Yet an argument can be made in favor of such a treaty, if the document is properly limited.

U.S. law has designated Israel a “major non-NATO ally.” The United States and Israel have numerous non-treaty agreements on intelligence sharing, military aid, defense industrial cooperation, free trade and other matters. **It could make sense to put a treaty in place that would serve as an umbrella agreement – a broad statement of the friendship between the parties – that would give a treaty structure to all the various executive agreements that already exist. That would elevate Israel to the status of treaty ally of the United States.** It would not change much, if anything, but it would be a sign of U.S.-Israeli friendship and cooperation. Also, it could help preserve and promote bipartisan U.S. support for Israel. There is value in that. No one who values the U.S.-Israeli relationship should want American friendship toward Israel to cease to be broad-based and bipartisan.

U.S. AND ISRAELI OFFICIALS HAVE LONG REFRAINED FROM NEGOTIATING A MUTUAL DEFENSE TREATY BECAUSE IT WAS JUDGED UNNECESSARY AND POTENTIALLY HARMFUL TO BOTH COUNTRIES.

Yet, the longstanding reasons not to conclude a NATO-type mutual defense treaty remain valid and argue against hasty action. It would not serve either party's interest to commit to each other's defense in such a way that it would interfere with Israel's freedom of action or America's ability to renounce involvement in operations that Israel undertakes for its own reasons.

B. THE U.S. DEFENSE “EMERGENCY”

The U.S. National Defense Strategy Commission (of which Admiral Roughead was co-chair) issued a report in November 2018 that warns that the United States is facing a national security crisis – an “emergency” – due to deficiencies in defense spending, operational planning, development of new defense technologies and maintenance of the U.S. nuclear deterrent.¹³⁰

Some of the key points of the Commission's report:

- U.S. military superiority is no longer ensured against the combined threats of several state and non-state adversaries. War has become more likely as U.S. allies lose confidence in American deterrence and China, Russia and others shift the regional military balances in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and the Western Pacific. The United States might lose a war in the near future against China or Russia or another adversary.
- The Defense Department should reassess the Middle East to better confront major-power conflict. Russia's presence there inhibits U.S. freedom of action.

- America “confronts five major security challengers across at least three important geographic regions, and . . . unforeseen challenges are also likely to arise.” The United States “needs more than just new capabilities; it urgently requires new operational concepts.” Russia and China are “challenging the United States, its allies, and its partners on a far greater scale than has any adversary since the Cold War’s end.”
- Forward posture helps deter potential enemies and assure friends. In the Middle East, the U.S. needs to continue fighting ISIS and other jihadist groups. U.S. forces must be poised to “counter Iranian subversion and deter Iran and its proxies from overt military aggression.” Russia’s engagement in Syria and Chinese involvement throughout the region ensures major-power rivalry in the Middle East, which demands “significant special operations forces, light attack aircraft, ISR [intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance] assets, close air support, and security-force advice-and-assist brigades for the foreseeable future.” It may also be required for the United States to have “carrier-based naval aviation and other advanced naval and air capabilities—including surface warfare capabilities and fifth-generation aircraft— . . . “to deter and if necessary defeat Iran, or project power into areas where other advanced militaries (such as Russia’s) operate.” Thus, the *“U.S. military posture in the Middle East should not become dramatically smaller, even though the precise mix of U.S. capabilities should be reexamined.”* (emphasis in original).
- **If it is to meet the National Defense Strategy goals, the U.S. will have to expand its force.**

C. SPECIFIED U.S. DEFENSE NEEDS

The U.S. National Defense Strategy for 2018 lists “key capability and capacity needs.”

U.S. and Israeli officials should form a committee under their existing bilateral Defense Policy Advisory Group to propose appropriate joint projects regarding these capabilities and capacities. They should consider combined efforts involving governmental, commercial and academic entities.

The needs identified in the National Defense Strategy include:

1. Space and cyberspace as warfighting domains.
2. Command, control, communications, computers and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR).
3. Missile defense.
4. Joint lethality in contested environments.
5. Forward force maneuver and posture resilience.
6. Advanced autonomous systems.
7. Resilient and agile logistics.¹³¹

D. HEEDING EACH OTHER’S STRATEGIC ANALYSES

Key to a well-functioning alliance is a common threat assessment. Partner countries, however, often do not invest enough in learning and considering each other’s views and trying to achieve common ground on strategic analysis.

U.S. national security policies have changed in major respects over the last two years. These changes are reflected in the administration’s key strategy documents, even in the unclassified versions that have been published.

In the Joint Political-Military Group and the Defense Policy Advisory Group, U.S. and Israeli officials should schedule time to review and discuss together the key strategic documents of each side – for example, the 2017 U.S. National Security Strategy and the 2018 U.S. National Defense Strategy and Israeli counterpart documents.

KEY TO A WELL-FUNCTIONING ALLIANCE IS A COMMON THREAT ASSESSMENT. PARTNER COUNTRIES SHOULD WORK HARDER TO LEARN AND CONSIDER EACH OTHER’S VIEWS.

E. OTHER AREAS FOR COOPERATION

Brief mention is made here of other areas for U.S.-Israeli defense cooperation.

Israeli maritime strategy. The Israeli government should initiate an effort to specify Israel's maritime interests as the basis for creating a maritime strategy that will set objectives and propose ways to achieve them. Policies for all elements of the maritime domain should be incorporated into the strategy. Assistance could be provided by various U.S. institutions, including the Naval Postgraduate School and the Navy War College.

Maritime domain awareness – on and under the sea, maritime domain awareness systems and systems to counter illicit and nefarious activities should be integrated into undersea infrastructure defense plans. Both countries should give such systems high priority in their research and development efforts and in their operating priorities by both countries.

Cyber threats. Special attention is warranted for threats to shipping and ports. The United States and Israel need plans for protecting their commercial fleet and ports against cyber surveillance and attack. This is particularly important given operations by a Chinese entity of part of Israel's Haifa port.

Offshore energy facilities. Israel's public controversy over where to locate the offshore production facility for the Leviathan gas field raised many maritime policy questions. Israel does not have an official forum experienced and engaged in such questions nor an authorized entity to deal with them. Israel is now a maritime nation and should establish an expert forum to analyze how actions in the maritime domain can affect gas development, infrastructure vulnerability, environmental interests and other considerations. The Haifa Research Center for Maritime Policy and Strategy has studied the options for maritime natural gas handling and the vulnerability of storage facilities to security threats.

NO U.S. COMBATANT COMMAND HAS THE DAY-TO-DAY RESPONSIBILITY TO DEAL STRATEGICALLY WITH THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT (OR THE PAKISTANI-INDIAN CONFLICT).

F. CHALLENGES CREATED BY ISRAEL'S EXCLUSION FROM U.S. CENTCOM'S AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY

The area of responsibility of the U.S. Central Command is the greater Middle East, but it does not include Israel. Israel is assigned to the area of responsibility of the U.S. European Command. The rationale for this strategic "gerrymander" is concern that Arab states might cooperate less if Central Command officers were in regular contact with Israelis. But the Middle East is changing. Arab officials from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and elsewhere now openly talk of Israel as a strategic partner in opposing Iranian aggression. The idea that Israel must remain out of Central Command may be outdated. **U.S. defense officials should consider redrawing the Central Command's area of responsibility to include Israel.**

The U.S. Departments of Defense and State divide the world into regions. (The division schemes in the two departments are not the same.) Such divisions are administratively necessary, but they create impediments to sound strategic thinking. Officials responsible for a particular region tend not to pay as much attention to events, concerns, perceptions and capabilities outside that region.

From Central Command's inception, its area of responsibility included the Arab states but excluded Israel. Similarly, Central Command's area of responsibility includes Pakistan, but excludes India, which is the responsibility of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command.

This means that no U.S. combatant command has the day-to-day responsibility to deal strategically with the Arab-Israeli conflict (or the Pakistani-Indian conflict).

Central Command has always tended to be focused on Arab equities, rather than on Israel's, and more on Pakistan's than India's. Meanwhile, the Indo-Pacific Command is more solicitous of India. And so on.

The Defense Department should consider how to mitigate this problem. Central Command planners should be encouraged to take full advantage of America's military and intelligence relationships with Israel. It is neither necessary, advantageous nor historically justified to exclude Israel from efforts by the Central Command to bolster its military plans through regional cooperation. Israel's inclusion in the Central Command's area of responsibility could add to the ability of both states to respond effectively in a crisis.

Today, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain and other Gulf Arab states are publicly breaking down barriers to their own direct and open cooperation with Israel against Iran, Islamic State and other Islamist extremist groups.

The Defense Department should therefore reexamine whether Israel should be moved into Central Command's area of responsibility. That might facilitate military cooperation with Israel. And it might promote more contact and cooperation between Israel and the Arab states.

Beyond reconsidering the Israel question, the Defense Department should broadly reassess areas of responsibility of the three Eurasia-related combatant commands (Europe, Central and Indo-Pacific). Russia and China, the two peer competitors identified in the National Security Strategy and the National Defense Strategy, cover much of Eurasia and cooperate closely. The global economic center of gravity moved to the heart of Eurasia since the U.S. combatant commands were established. Hence a review is in order, and should include the Departments of Defense, State and Commerce.

Even if the reexamination results in reaffirmation of the current arrangements, Central Command should host an Israeli Defense Forces liaison element in its headquarters.

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EGYPT, JORDAN, SAUDI ARABIA,
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V. ISRAEL'S DEFENSE INDUSTRIAL BASE AND CIVILIAN SHIPPING INDUSTRY

Israel should assess the adequacy of its defense industrial base, with particular attention to industrial and technical entities involved in the maritime domain. As it does not have a mechanism in place to make the assessment, U.S. defense officials may be in a position to assist. This could be discussed in the U.S.-Israeli Defense Policy Advisory Group.

The Israeli Navy does not build its major combatant vessels in Israel. As a result, smaller amounts of U.S. security assistance ("Foreign Military Sales") funds are used for the Israeli navy. To build its large vessels (frigates and submarines), the Israeli Navy relies on European shipyards. As a result, the Israeli Navy

lacks the kind of intimate technical relationship with American counterparts and U.S. industry that the Israeli Air Force has. This limits the sharing of Navy-related operational experience between Israelis and Americans.

In 2018, the U.S. Department of Defense published an interagency report on the U.S. defense industrial base and supply chain security in light of China's growth as a predatory economic power with a policy of military-civilian integration. Israeli officials should be briefed on this report by its authors.¹³² Moreover, matters relating to industrial and innovation bases and supply chain security should be parts of an ongoing U.S.-Israeli dialogue.

For national security reasons over and above its commercial interests, Israel requires a fleet of commercial and military vessels. Its shipping industry faces difficult competition from foreign commercial fleets, some from countries with well-established maritime traditions and some from countries that provide only flags of convenience. This

An Israeli Navy vessel passes by a production platform at the Tamar natural gas field during a squadron exercise on May 27, 2013 off Israel's Mediterranean coast. (Photo by Uriel Sinai/Getty Images)

competition has suppressed the number of Israeli ships and an indigenous maritime workforce.

Establishing a minimal number of vessels – a critical mass – for its commercial fleet would allow Israel, for security and economic reasons, to maintain an organic servicing fleet for offshore gas operations. It would help ensure essential shipping during wartime to and from Israel. **Israel should also establish a policy for operating its commercial fleet and ports during**

an emergency. Necessary capabilities should be determined and an operating plan formulated. Port infrastructure for Israel's general cargo, which is approximately half of Israel's total trade, should be upgraded, similarly to what was done for container traffic. The government should lead that planning.

To support Israeli shipping, Israeli law should revise its tonnage tax and require shipping companies to invest in training Israeli merchant marine officers.

APPENDIX

THE EVOLVING NATURE OF WAR AND INTEGRATION OF DIPLOMATIC, POLITICAL, LEGAL AND MILITARY DIMENSIONS

In the course of this project, the team members engaged extensively in discussions about the evolving nature of war. Admiral Ami Ayalon (retired), the former Director of Israel's Security Agency ("Shin Bet") and chief of the Israeli navy, initiated this examination and contributed valuably to it. As it ranged beyond the subject of maritime security in the Eastern Mediterranean, the team members decided to deal with this topic as an attachment to this report.

Throughout history, wars generally hinged on clashes of arms. To win, a party had to defeat its enemy's military forces. For the United States since the Vietnam War of the 1960s and 1970s, however, the only conflict of this conventional model was the Gulf War of 1990-91. Israeli wars have not conformed to that model since the end of the 1973 October (Yom Kippur) War. Having remained largely unchanged for millennia, the character of war has changed radically only in recent decades. Inter-state battlefield clashes of arms are now rare, although the amount of tanks, mechanized weapons and fighter aircraft that exist in arsenals around the world means that traditional arms clashes remain possible.

The United States and Israel have been more active in wars than have most countries, and in general now the aim of war against them has been to change a foe's policies without having to defeat that foe's military forces. Political and military decision-makers have not fully adapted to the new reality.

To be sure, the 2018 U.S. National Defense Strategy highlights military threats from China and Russia and says, "Inter-

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state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in U.S. national security." The point is well grounded. Nonetheless, democratic countries are particularly vulnerable to asymmetric strategies – those using military operations and techniques mainly designed for political rather than military effects. And even major state powers use asymmetric strategies, as Russia did with its "hybrid" warfare in Ukraine¹³³ and China has done with its armed civilian reserve force in the South China Sea.¹³⁴

By enormously increasing information flow around the world, the Internet, small satellites, drones, improved sensors, cell phone video cameras and broadband connectivity, are transforming both war and politics. These technologies allow military forces

to find targets and strike them with great precision from long distances. They open the way for cyber warfare, hacking and manipulation of foreign political systems. They allow individuals to broadcast not just text but also photos and videos instantaneously and globally in ways that many states cannot control. And, at the same time, they give authoritarian states instruments for political control and repression that exceed anything ever imagined even by George Orwell.

Information operations can be far more potent than ever before. They are not just technical. They do not simply facilitate war by functioning as “force multipliers.” Rather, *substantive* information operations – propaganda, arguments, images, and “narratives” – can serve as primary instruments for achieving war aims, especially against democratic countries.

Such operations often focus on news media – mainstream and otherwise – to influence elite and popular opinion. In democratic countries, the news media are especially rich targets for manipulation because public opinion there matters more and the news outlets are more likely to be independent of the government.

In all events, news media are important because people in general have little understanding of foreign conflicts except what they gather from the news as the conflict is underway. They usually have no relevant personal experience, and their knowledge of history is often negligible. This is true of elites also, including government officials and news reporters themselves. News media reports shape public opinion directly and through influencing other news media. In other words, journalists tend to reinforce one another. Their reports often blend into self-affirming conventional wisdom, despite errors of fact and context. This is the point of the humorous quip that journalists often operate as a “herd of independent minds.” Non-state actors manipulate that “herd” to counter the military superiority of their enemies. Those who fail to take this into account can find themselves defeated by a weaker opponent.

In the past, battlefield events were intended to influence international politics only indirectly and in the long run. Combat’s immediate goal was military: to damage the other side’s ability to fight. Now, however, an attack’s immediate purpose is often to produce news reports that will put pressure on enemy decision-makers without actually reducing their ability to fight. The target is the enemy’s will rather than capability. Ironically, battlefield success, if it results in negative news media coverage, may do a party more harm than good.

The United States and Israel in recent decades have continually been at war with insurgent movements and terrorist

BATTLEFIELD SUCCESS, IF IT RESULTS IN NEGATIVE NEWS MEDIA COVERAGE, MAY DO A PARTY MORE HARM THAN GOOD.

organizations. Generally lacking the kind of strategic “center of gravity” that conventional armies (and other highly organized bodies) possess, such movements and organizations have been able to keep fighting under circumstances that would compel a conventional army to surrender. They use information – both truthful and false – as an invaluable weapon of war. Sometimes, as with ISIS, they use it to intensify and spread fear, increasing the effect of terrorist acts. Sometimes they present themselves as victims of inhumane enemies, as when Hamas in Gaza deliberately attacks Israel from populated areas to draw Israeli retaliation that inevitably destroys homes, schools or hospitals and kills or injures civilians. Both strategies can be used simultaneously to produce news media images that strengthen the weaker side and weaken the stronger.

Groups that depict themselves as victims of Western powers win automatic support from Western news media. Images that reinforce simple notions – “narratives” – of this kind of victimization can exercise powerful influence. With certain types of audiences, such images cannot be countered quickly and effectively. Explanations about context, history and other complexities don’t work.

Consider, for example, the image of a child facing an American or Israeli tank. Mainstream news media can be counted on to feature it prominently. It will likely “go viral” on social media. And it can generate immediate, widespread, unthinking sympathy. A single image of this kind can generate substantial worldwide support for the child’s side in a conflict against the United States or Israel.

War thus becomes a morality tale or “reality show” in which violence is provoked to produce horrifying images to influence other people’s political opinions. Skillful military action taken by a technologically advanced state to defend its territory and people can generate images that make its defensive action look aggressive, offensive and inhumane – in a word, villainous. The effective use of force can produce a strategic loss.

As violent non-state actors wage battles with political rather than military goals – to demoralize their enemies and persuade them to quit fighting and retreat – the other side must also operate politically. Counter-insurgency strategy recognizes the importance of military operations with immediate political goals. It aims to curtail support that insurgents or terrorists receive from the population that either harbors them voluntarily or submits to their intimidation.

Each side in such a conflict has an interest in understanding its adversary's society – its aspirations, needs and internal composition. The enemy's "home front" can be the war's most important theater.

Terrorist organizations target their enemies' civilians on the home front. Meanwhile, terrorists locate their own personnel and weapons among civilians on their own side's home front. Both of these tactics test the social resilience of the country fighting the terrorists. That country may find itself without an option for quick victory. This also requires resilience, patience and cohesiveness rooted in strong morale. Sustained domestic political support for the war effort is the country's strategic center of gravity. If it can keep such support, it can prevail; if it loses it, the terrorists win.

In such wars, heterogeneous democratic societies have particular challenges. Their resilience is a function of trust among their different communities of citizens. The war effort needs broad popular support, which it can lose if the war comes to be viewed as the project of an elite or a special interest group or if the burdens are seen as unfairly distributed. Healthy democratic institutions can be crucial to overcoming these challenges. It is especially important that democratic countries respect the distinction between combatants and civilian population, as this can be crucial to maintaining popular support for a war effort.

When a country, especially a democratic country, is fighting a war against terrorists, opinion abroad – views voiced by foreign officials and journalists, for example, or incorporated in resolutions of the United Nations or other international organizations – can influence domestic public opinion and affect the willingness of foreign governments to provide help.

The contest for public opinion highlights one of the remarkable paradoxes of terrorist warfare: Though terrorists flout law, they rely heavily on legalism. They exploit the reverence for law in democratic countries. Terrorists violate the most important principle of the law of war by deliberately harming civilians. They target those of the enemy and often endanger their own side's civilians by hiding among them, using them as human shields

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and locating weapons and equipment in civilian hospitals, schools apartment buildings and the like. At the same time, the terrorists' political strategy hinges on the argument that their enemies, in fighting back, harm civilians and fail to respect the law of war.

Such cynicism wins rewards when officials in the European Union, the UN General Assembly and other bodies, for example, condemn Israeli responses to terrorist attacks. Such condemnations are political in nature – voiced by political officials in political forums. But they are often interpreted as disinterested legal judgments. EU and UN resolutions are commonly (though incorrectly) taken as signs of legitimacy. In fact, they are simply the opinions of interested parties.

Because people generally know and care little about other people's conflicts, "world opinion" can easily be swayed and misled by a simple line of argument or a single powerful image – recall the point made above about the image of a child facing an American or Israeli tank. Such an image may be out of context – or it may be bogus altogether – but it may nevertheless strongly sway opinion in a world full of people who are ill informed or predisposed to sympathize with the ostensible victim. It is a crucial and difficult strategic challenge to counter

the information operations of terrorist groups that are skillful in depicting themselves as victims of strong Western powers.

Terrorist groups adopt war strategies that blur lines between the domestic and the international, between civilian and military, between diplomacy and armed conflict and between crime and war. Often, the goal is "no surrender" – denying victory to their adversary. Since the first intifada began in 1987, in more than three decades of continuous Israeli struggle against terrorism, no terror organization has ever raised a white flag. Hamas and Hezbollah have provoked Israeli military operations and then converted them, despite the operations' military effectiveness, into greater local popular support for themselves.

After the initial phase of "classical" warfare to overthrow the regimes, U.S.-led coalition forces in Iraq and Afghanistan had difficulty devising a strategy for decisive, sustainable military victory over the insurgents. Eventually, the coalition resolved to win the support of local populations – in Iraq, principally Sunni tribes – by protecting them from the insurgents. This involved patient interaction with the local people, activity that was in many ways the opposite of what would have been done if the goal were a quick and devastating military strike against the insurgents.

Unlike conventional wars, the campaigns of violent non-state actors often lack a clear beginning and end point. Such campaigns are not rare or exceptional, but are an ongoing, virtually constant phenomenon in the world today. Americans remain engaged in such a campaign in Afghanistan, and Israelis are so engaged on multiple fronts. Such campaigns have forced military strategists to focus on concepts such as "military operations other than war" and "the campaign between wars."

War against terrorist organizations tends to involve short periods of high intensity fighting, preceded and followed by periods of lower intensity. The shifts to high intensity can be purposeful or unintended by the party that provides the trigger.

The standard for success in a war against terrorists may be similar to that for domestic crime fighting. The standard is not elimination of all terrorism – or of all crime. Rather, it is to lower the violence to a level that allows society to function normally, while preserving its essential character and principles. After 9/11, the U.S. government set the aim of the war on terrorism as defeating terrorism as a threat to America's way of life as a free and open society.

Among the sensible military objectives in such a war are defending the state's population, territory and infrastructure;

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LAW, THEY RELY HEAVILY ON
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disrupting and deterring attacks through activities at home and abroad; lengthening the time between high-intensity peaks; and countering ideological support for terrorism.

America's enemies in the war on terrorism were mainly non-state jihadist groups functioning as a network of networks. They did not have much organizational structure. Israel, however,

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has terrorist enemies that have substantial organizational structure. Special strategic challenges face Israel as a result of Hamas's control over Gaza and Hezbollah's political role within Lebanon. In response, Israel's war on terrorism has developed the concept of "flexible deterrence," which relies on threats of measured military force combined with various economic, political and diplomatic sanctions and incentives. This concept is based on distinguishing between the terrorist group and the population within which it operates. **The key challenge is to find political, economic or other ways to influence the general population so that they have the will and courage to constrain the terrorists' power.** This could lower the risk that minor skirmishes will ignite major confrontations. It could help Israel prevent successful terrorist operations and also incentivize the local population to free itself from terrorist control.

American and Israeli planners have yet to assess how all these changes in the nature of modern war should alter the ways we develop and use military force.

The foregoing discussion illuminates what is meant by the term "asymmetric war" – conflicts of the militarily weak against the strong. As noted, the weak party pursues a strategy that aims *directly* at political results, rather than trying to achieve such results through military victories.

In such conflicts, the key war weapons can be arguments and actions that are diplomatic, legal and moral – domestic and international. The decisive arena is less likely to be a military battlefield than the U.S. Congress or the Israeli Knesset. The most important wins may be scored with a heartrending videotape of civilian casualties, in a CNN interview, a UN Security Council meeting or a New York Times editorial.

This means that military preparedness is not enough. War preparations in the United States and Israel do not take the asymmetrical nature of warfare nowadays properly into account.

The United States and Israel should strategize, train and exercise the information aspects of conflict. **Their officials should anticipate diplomatic, legal and moral arguments they will need for future conflicts.** Both countries stockpile military equipment and munitions. They train their forces to use these items and conduct exercises with them. They should do the same regarding *political* weapons. **They should prepare in advance the necessary political and legal arguments. They should train diplomats and legislative and public affairs officials for their roles as "warriors." They should routinely and seriously exercise war-related political operations together with their military exercises.**

"GRAY ZONE" CONFLICTS ARE NOT PEACEFUL, BUT THEY ARE SHORT OF OUTRIGHT WARFARE.

For nearly a century, military thinkers have stressed the crucial importance of "jointness" – that is, changing the mentality, planning and practices of military officers so that the army, navy, marines, air force and coast guard can all operate together, and not just separately. **To meet the challenges of asymmetric political-military conflict, those responsible for the political aspects should plan, train and exercise jointly with those responsible for the military aspects.**

"Gray Zone" conflict is now an important asymmetric strategy. The term "gray zone" applies to a category of conflicts in world affairs. In such affairs, there is a spectrum of competition. It runs from peaceful pursuit of advantages through limited use of force to the outright warfare between established armed forces. "Gray zone" conflicts are not peaceful, but they are short of outright warfare.

For many years, analysts have noted the importance of activities in this spectrum's mid-section. These include irregular warfare of the Yugoslav partisans or the French resistance in World War II; anti-imperial "national liberation" struggles fought in the period of decolonization; and the terrorism of radical groups in Europe, Japan and elsewhere from the late 1960s forward.

In the 1980s, the term "low-intensity conflict" became popular as a way of referring to violent campaigns that were not large-scale or intense enough to qualify simply as wars. The term "gray zone" gained currency after Russia conquered Crimea through the use of soldiers that wore uniforms without insignia so that they could not readily be identified definitively as Russians.

Western strategists should refine their understanding of the 'gray zone' construct. Why does it work? Where might it be replicated or adapted? What vulnerabilities does it exploit? How can it be countered? Can we stymie adversary gray zone strategy and tactics if we collectively think anew?

Consider the recent war strategies of Hamas and Hezbollah: Hamas strikes Israel – by firing rockets, kidnapping an Israeli

or otherwise. Hamas proclaims a victory. Knowing that Israel will feel compelled to retaliate, Hamas locates military assets in civilian schools, hospitals and residential areas. Hamas's goal is limiting Israel's retaliation by ensuring that Israel's action will cause enormous damage to Palestinian civilians.

Hamas's strategy relies on provoking/compelling/inducing Israel to take action that will outrage world public opinion. Hamas's *military* strategy is based on political calculations that are based on *legal* arguments that aim to produce moral revulsion against Israel.

It would be helpful for Israel to organize in advance to counter Hamas in the political, legal and moral domains, just as it works in advance to countering Hamas's rockets and other military tools. "Lawfare" and other information-related arguments should be developed in advance. Israeli military and civilian personnel should be trained to make the arguments in diplomatic, news media and other forums. **Training exercises should aim for jointness of military and information operations.**

The Mavi Marmara incident highlights the way that even a minor military operation can have strategic consequences.

Military commanders and civilian security officials should be trained to consider the broader and longer-term consequences of all their actions. Here are the essentials of strategic thinking:

a. Goals. Formulate goals succinctly and clearly. Consider how short-term practical goals fit within longer-term larger national security goals of the country's civilian leadership.

b. Immediate ripple effects. Consider how affairs not immediately and obviously connected to your action (or inaction) will be affected. Think about unintended consequences. Probe beyond the obvious.

c. Down-the-road effects. Consider longer-term consequences. What are the several next steps that you and others may take. Try to "look around corners." Again, strive to anticipate the unintended and non-obvious.

d. Ongoing adjustment of means and ends. Review continually whether your means suit your goals. If not, adjust one thing or the other.

e. Stability versus pigheadedness. A key purpose of strategy is giving your team reasonably stable goals. Team members should not have to wake up every day asking what their purpose is. But you should not retain a goal if you conclude it is unachievable or otherwise wrong. Good strategy is neither mercurial nor excessively stubborn.

f. Know your enemy. Strategy is ultimately about influencing the actions of individuals. It's crucial to know as much as possible about the individuals you are trying to influence. Avoid the common mistake of "mirror imaging" – that is, assuming that they are just like you. Recognize that people are diverse. Others may react entirely differently from the way you would under similar circumstances. Learn about the culture, habits, frame of mind, goals, principles, loyalties, sense of honor and other traits of your enemies.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Iran's push to the Mediterranean taps into a strategic tradition that reaches back to the invasion of Greece in the fifth century BCE by the Persian King Darius.
- ² John Wagner, "Trump defends Syria decision amid backlash, says Iran and Russia will now fight ISIS," *Chicago Tribune*, December 20, 2018.
- ³ Now called a carrier strike group, comprising 7,500 or so personnel, an aircraft carrier, a cruiser, a destroyer squadron and a carrier air wing with approximately 70 aircraft – sometimes also submarines with accompanying logistics ships.
- ⁴ Critics of President Obama's policy said "pivot" was insulting to the Middle East because it connoted a desire to turn one's back to the region. The strategy was then relabeled as a "rebalancing" of U.S. forces in favor of Asia. Part of its rationale was to free up additional military, economic aid and other resources to be devoted to the Far East. But more was done to disengage from the Middle East than to bolster U.S. engagement in the Asia-Pacific.
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