ISRAEL'S FOREIGN POLICY BEYOND THE ARAB WORLD

ENGAGING THE PERIPHERY

Jean-Loup Samaan

Israel's Foreign Policy Beyond the Arab World

For over 60 years, Israel's foreign policy establishment has looked at its regional policy through the lens of a geopolitical concept named "the periphery doctrine." The idea posited that due to the fundamental hostility of neighboring Arab countries, Israel ought to counterbalance this threat by engaging with the "periphery" of the Arab world through clandestine diplomacy.

Based on original research in the Israeli diplomatic archives and interviews with key past and present decision-makers, this book shows that this concept of a periphery was, and remains, a core driver of Israel's foreign policy. The periphery was borne out of the debates among Zionist circles concerning the geopolitics of the nascent Israeli State. The evidence from Israel's contemporary policies shows that these principles survived the historical relationships with some countries (Iran, Turkey, Ethiopia) and were emulated in other cases: Azerbaijan, Greece, South Sudan, and even to a certain extent in the attempted exchanges by Israel with Gulf Arab kingdoms. The book enables readers to understand Israel's pessimistic – or realist, in the traditional sense – philosophy when it comes to the conduct of foreign policy. The history of the periphery doctrine sheds light on fundamental issues, such as Israel's role in the regional security system, its overreliance on military and intelligence cooperation as tools of diplomacy, and finally its enduring perception of inextricable isolation.

Through a detailed appraisal of Israel's periphery doctrine from its birth in the fifties until its contemporary renaissance, this book offers a new perspective on Israel's foreign policy, and will appeal to students and scholars of Middle East Politics and History, and International Relations.

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Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Politics

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For Ines and Emilie

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Acknowledgments

This book is the result of research conducted for an accreditation to supervise research defended at Sciences Po's Doctoral School in September 2017. Therefore, first and foremost, my thanks go to my supervisor, Frederic Ramel, professor of political science at Sciences Po, for his trust, his support and his precious advices all along the project. Moreover, I would like to thank the members of the defense committee: Ilan Greilsammer, Pascal Vennesson, Jean-Vincent Holeindre, Beatrice Heuser, and Alain Dieckhoff.

I also would like to express my gratitude to my former institution, the NATO Defense College, without which this investigation would not have been possible. From 2011 to 2016, the College offered me a wonderful working environment that enabled me to develop my project and turn it into a book. I greatly benefited from comments and exchanges with my former colleagues there: Florence Gaub, Guillaume Lasconjarias, and Andreas Jacobs. I am also indebted to the former course members of my elective on Israel's periphery doctrine. For two years, these officers and diplomats from a dozen of nations shared my passion for the topic and helped me, through our discussions, to refine my analysis.

In Israel, my sincere appreciation goes to all government officials and retired practitioners who accepted to meet with me and share their insights. The State Archives gave me an invaluable access to historical documents of Israel's foreign policy. In addition, Ariel Levite helped in our numerous and friendly conversations to better grasp the complexities of Israel's politics.

Finally, I am deeply grateful for the support of the editors at Routledge. Joe Whiting and Emma Tyce believed in the manuscript and supported me to turn the manuscript into a book.

Obviously, the shortcomings of this book are my own.

Introduction

On August 23, 2012, an article from the Israeli newspaper, the *Jerusalem Post*, offered an assessment of the diplomatic achievements of the rather controversial Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman.[1] The Russian-born Israeli politician, West Bank settler, Liberman had been perceived by Western audiences as a bellicose foreign minister who did not hesitate in antagonizing Egyptians or Palestinians in his public statements. But on that day, the *Jerusalem Post* piece was offering a different narrative, actually making the case for a positive assessment of the policies conducted by Israel's Foreign Minister. Despite "anti-Israel bias" from UN agencies and the European Union, the newspaper argued that Liberman succeeded in his mandate by reaching out to countries in Africa and Asia: "Simply put, Liberman has revived Israel's 'periphery doctrine' of the 1950s, adjusting it to modern strategic realities."[2] The claims of the article regarding Liberman's achievements may have been debatable but the piece did reflect a significant trend in the rhetoric of the Israeli foreign policy debate at that time. Specifically, it identified with Liberman's agenda, the renaissance of the so-called "periphery doctrine," a concept that had been at the forefront of Israel's diplomatic agenda from the fifties to the seventies but had afterward completely disappeared.

By the end of 2012, numerous publications from newspapers and defense-related think tanks in Israel were reviving this idea. Like the *Jerusalem Post*, a research paper from the Tel Aviv-based Institute for National Security Studies stated that "one of Israel's most notable political moves of recent years has been its reaching out to states on the Middle Eastern periphery in order to strengthen ties with them."[3] For the Israeli foreign policy community, the root cause identified for this renaissance was almost always the same: the degradation of Israel's regional environment. For Yoel Guzansky and Gallia Lindenstrauss, it was "Israel's ongoing rift with the Arab world and its relative isolation in various arenas" that triggered the new periphery doctrine.[4] In a blog post for *Times of Israel*, David Turner went further. He argued that Israel's return to the periphery doctrine was not only triggered by the crisis with Turkey and the Arab Spring but it also constituted "a long-term strategic response to shifting American policy priorities."[5]

Therefore, if the periphery doctrine resurfaced and looked for many pundits as a relevant answer to Israeli contemporary predicaments, we may wonder why

there was a need to unearth a political concept from the fifties. Interestingly, Yossi Alpher, a retired Mossad agent, wrote that this revival was due to the fact that the security challenges faced by Israel were "reminiscent of those it faced in the early decades of its existence."[6] For Alpher, Israel faced a "new ring of hostility" that caused decision-makers to look for options based on past experiences. In other words, the periphery approach returned because political circles used analogical reasoning: they perceived a similar environment that called for a similar answer.[7] This is where my research investigation started.

The research question

The starting point of my inquiry was a question with both academic and policy ramifications: how and why could an old political concept resurface in decision-making circles to address new security challenges? A follow-up question to this initial one was to evaluate the enduring relevance of the idea and assess if this renaissance was not a misleading fad. My initial discussions with diplomats and journalists revealed a surprising reality: the origins and content of this foreign policy concept were barely known for most of the observers.[8] In my interviews in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, it was common knowledge that the very expression "periphery doctrine" dated back to the early years of the establishment of Israel as a modern State when its policymakers – among them its prime minister, David Ben-Gurion – designed this concept that aimed to drive the national foreign policy agenda.

Officials knew that the concept posited that due to the fundamental hostility of neighboring Arab countries (Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan) Israel ought to counterbalance this threat by engaging with the "periphery" of the Arab world. This was deemed a classic Israeli foreign policy principle. But often neglected is the fact that this "periphery" was not a clearly circumscribed space. As it soon appeared to me through the preliminary phases of the research, it was not a geopolitical concept that would identify specific territories to conquer, but rather a political metaphor loosely based on geography. Although it was evoked as the "periphery doctrine," it had no doctrinal ramifications in the military sense. Therefore, I argue in the following pages, that it should better be understood as an intellectual matrix.

If we base our understanding of the periphery on diplomatic cables and official speeches, it usually includes non-Arab States – mostly Turkey, Ethiopia, and Iran but also African countries in general and sometimes emerging Asian powers such as China or India. Some officials in the government also include ethnic minorities – primarily Christians and Kurds – in the region as parts of the periphery. This additional layer made the map of the periphery more confused as these ethnic groups would be located in countries like Syria and Lebanon, which logically could not be perceived as peripheral. But despite this hazy background, the periphery addressed a challenge that Israeli governments faced: regional isolation and the search for normalization. This is why starting in the late fifties and in the following decades, the concept gained traction and political ties were

developed by the Israeli decision-makers. But because all these peripheral partners aimed to maintain good, or at least stable, relations with Arab regimes, these exchanges with the newly established State of Israel would be discreet, if not secret, and mainly focused on the military and intelligence sectors.

Eventually, these relations would go through numerous crises, sometimes leading to the collapse of bilateral relations (Iran) or their suspension (Turkey, Ethiopia). Although the initial ambition was a regional policy, Israel applied the periphery principles only at the bilateral level. If one looks carefully at the endurance of the periphery concept in Israel's foreign policy debates, one would clearly identify its decline in the early eighties, following the dismantlement of Israel–Iran relations. But what we witness today with the recent renaissance of the concept is that although the idea was no longer used explicitly, its logic – or its underlying philosophy – remained significant. As a matter of fact, when the initial partnerships (with Iran, and Turkey) stumbled, they were progressively replaced by new ones with countries such as Azerbaijan and Greece. The selection of these countries obeyed the same logic of the periphery: balancing the threat or competition constituted by a State by siding with one of its competitors. But this time, the periphery doctrine was to be even more vaguely defined at the geographical level. It was to become a catch-all concept: sometimes Israel's outreach to countries as diverse as India, South Sudan and South Africa was characterized as illustrations of the "periphery doctrine," putting into question the analytical utility of the idea.

The argument

Officials and journalists tend to call "ideas" or "paradigms" terms and expressions that in reality serve only a symbolical and temporary value with neither real substance nor influence on policy matters. For scholars of international relations, overestimating the relevance of a policy concept is a frequent danger.[9] Therefore, it could be easily argued that if this "periphery" doctrine was loosely defined, it might be because it had only loose relevance and should be dismissed as a cyclical fad without interest for serious research. In the first phase of my investigation, this was in fact a frequent reaction I experienced from the people interviewed. To date, no official document has specified the purpose of the "periphery doctrine," its content was only made explicit through scattered declarations or publications from Israeli politicians, military officials or strategic thinkers. Furthermore, the use of "doctrine" implies a clearly stated military plan with allocated resources and personnel to achieve a specific goal. This does not exist either. This is why one diplomat in Jerusalem even argued that it was "no more than folklore and should not be considered too seriously."[10]

However, based on my findings, I argue differently. This book explains that this concept of a periphery was and remains a core driver of Israel's foreign policy. Practitioners may call the periphery a "doctrine" but it rather qualifies as a general paradigm of foreign policy that encompasses common perceptions and intended goals. To focus solely on evaluating the official character of the periphery concept would be misleading. While it may be mere "folklore," it not

only reflects the Israeli perception of its regional environment, but also sheds light on its conduct of diplomacy. In other words, the periphery captures the mindset of the national security establishment.

To support this argument, I demonstrate in the following pages how the periphery was borne out of the debates among Zionist circles concerning the geopolitics of the nascent Israeli State. Not only was this idea shaped by the foundation of Israel, it also derived from classic balancing behaviors identified elsewhere by International Relations scholarship and commonly associated with the *realpolitik* approach of the nineteenth century.[11] The record shows that the basic principles of the periphery concept – the balancing logic and its military and secretive dimension – provided guidance for the implementation of ties with the three historical peripheral allies: Turkey, Iran, and Ethiopia. Moreover, the evidence from Israel's contemporary policies shows that these principles survived the historical relationships and were emulated in other cases: Azerbaijan, Greece, South Sudan, and even to a certain extent in the attempted exchanges by Israel with Gulf Arab kingdoms.

Taken altogether, these findings help us to understand Israel's pessimistic – or realist, in the traditional sense – philosophy when it comes to the conduct of foreign policy.[12] The history of the periphery doctrine, its genesis and later development, sheds light on fundamental issues such as Israel's role in the regional security system, its overreliance on military and intelligence cooperation as tools of diplomacy, and finally its enduring perception of inextricable isolation.

Contribution to the literature on Israel's foreign policy

Although the "periphery" doctrine is a well-known topic of Israel's history, it has not yet brought about authoritative research or substantial academic discussion. The reason is that scholarship dedicated to Israel's foreign policy is primarily focused on the history of Israel's conflict with Arab countries.[13] Both political scientists and historians devoted their time to investigating what appeared to be – rightfully so – the core issue of Israel's foundations: its relations with its direct neighbors. Only a few studies have analyzed Israel's relations with Turkey, Iran, and Ethiopia. There has been no in-depth appraisal of these diplomatic efforts in relation with the periphery concept.[14]

In general, three views tend to shape the analysis of Israel's foreign policy. The first explains Israel's international behavior as primarily, if not uniquely, a reaction to its regional environment.[15] For instance, Efraim Inbar, a political scientist from Bar-Ilan University, writes "Israel is a small state whose fortunes are largely determined by external factors."[16] In other words, the geographical isolation of the country is identified as the primary key to understand the evolution of its diplomacy.

Another approach puts emphasis on Israel's foreign policy as a reflection of its social fabric and political system. Actors involved in domestic politics such as the settlers or the armed forces become, in that view, determinants of the

diplomacy-making.[17] For instance, Yoram Peri from Tel Aviv University argues, the military does shape the strategic orientations of Israel. Based on a study of the military's role during the second Intifada, Peri analyzes the central role of the armed forces "in setting Israeli foreign and defense policy, wielding influence at the supra-political level, the strategic level, and the operational level, no less than at the tactical military level."[18]

Finally, the third approach underlines the role of ideology, namely Zionism, as the overarching driver of Israel's political orientations. In the last two decades, scholarship has highlighted Israel's identity as an explanation for its foreign policy.[19] For such authors, Israel's diplomatic tradecraft had to be put into perspective with Zionist debates that preceded the establishment of the modern State. It was crucial to understand the founding myths and the national narratives that shaped Israeli identity. This is why for instance, in his book, *The Iron Wall*, historian Avi Shlaim sees Vladimir Jabotinsky's theory of building an Israeli State along an "iron wall" against Arab foes as the revealing paradigm of Israel's foreign policy over the last decades.[20]

From that perspective, this book aims to fill a gap in the literature in two ways. First, I show in the following chapters that the "periphery doctrine" is not a secondary topic of Israel's foreign policy history that shall remain in the background of Israel's troubled relations with the Arab world. I show how the developments in both issues mutually affected one another. In fact, one cannot grasp the intricacies of Israel's peripheral partnerships without looking at the simultaneous evolution of its relations with Arab neighbors. Second, this manuscript endeavors to follow the path of that political idea, the periphery, from its intellectual build-up to its policy application. Throughout that effort, I aim to underline that the three drivers identified earlier – geographical constraints, domestic politics, and ideology – played a role in the endurance of the periphery approach. In that sense, my research evidenced that the periphery idea was not simply a natural reaction because of Arab hostility. Zionist thinking, in particular the works of Jabotinsky, also brought about the doctrine. But ideology was only one dimension: bureaucratic battles and the dominance of the military and intelligence services within the national security apparatus forged the implementation of the doctrine.

All in all, my study carefully underlines the importance to be mindful of these three dimensions – geopolitical, bureaucratic, and ideological – to comprehend the evolution of the periphery doctrine. Beyond this case study, this multidimensional analysis should enrich scholarship on other areas of Israeli contemporary foreign policy.

Research method

To support my argument, I combine an analysis of the first period of the periphery doctrine during the Cold War era and the contemporary developments. The investigation looked at five selected cases of bilateral relations: Israel–Iran, Israel–Turkey, Israel–Ethiopia, Israel–Greece, and Israel–Azerbaijan. Additionally, I collected

information on cases of lesser importance but that still offered insights: Israel–South Sudan, Israel–India, Israel–China, and Israel's relations with Arab minorities (Christians, Kurds). If the periphery doctrine forged in the fifties called for a regional alliance, its implementation remained for the most part at the bilateral level, between Israel and each of its partners. Despite some limited multilateral initiatives in the military-intelligence domain, bilateralism remained the rule. Therefore I chose to reflect this reality by looking at each relation separately.

Case studies were not meant as mere descriptions of diplomatic relations that would have turned the book into a compilation of separate monographs. Instead, I designed the cases by looking at each of them for the drivers of the relation – the ideological component, the geopolitical context, and the bureaucratic variable. In that sense, I kept the cases connected to the overall discussion of the periphery concept.[21]

Given the scope of my research, the investigation is based on a survey of Israel's diplomatic history from its foundation to nowadays. With this aim, I used various types of sources. First, I researched institutional and private archives. The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs gave me access to declassified diplomatic cables for the early years of the periphery doctrine. In particular, I explored Israel State Archives for the years 1957, 1958, and 1959, which constitute the key moment for the formation of the alliance. I crossed these official sources with US official documents declassified by the US Department of State and the Central Intelligence Agency (diplomatic cables, memoranda, intelligence briefings) or revealed by the organization WikiLeaks. Dozens of relevant cables were found in the WikiLeaks/Cablegate archive, including documents to and from the State Department and the US embassies in Tel Aviv, Ankara, and elsewhere. In Tehran, parts of the diplomatic materials from the US Embassy during the reign of the Shah have been released following the takeover by the Islamic revolutionaries. Private archives of major Israeli policymakers were also used to better evaluate the individual dimension of the decisions being taken and the importance of the personal ties developed through the process. That included essays, memoirs, speeches, and sometimes correspondence from key actors (David Ben-Gurion, Shimon Peres, Golda Meir, and Abba Eban, among others). These sources usually confirmed, occasionally amended or complemented the official archives. Sometimes, the intimacy described by Israeli statesmen of their relations with foreign leaders underlined the importance of the human factor, something that could not have been measured through diplomatic cables and official reports.

For the third part of the book, which deals with contemporary events, access to official material was obviously more difficult because of the classification obstacle. So I relied both on documents accessed through international and local media outlets (primarily the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Haaretz*, and *Jerusalem Post*). More importantly, I conducted interviews through a series of four field trips to Israel. Each field trip lasted one to several weeks and included meetings with officers, diplomats, politicians, journalists, as well as scholars. In total, about 60 interviews were conducted. Given the sensitivity of the topics and

the official responsibilities of the interviewees, interviews were not recorded and I decided to maintain general anonymity and to refer only to the exchanges by mentioning the professional affiliation of the person.

Finally, the analysis exposed in this book also benefited from participant observation. As a NATO official, working as an advisor for the Middle East Faculty of the NATO Defense College, from 2011 to 2016, I had the privilege of meeting and working on a regular basis with Israeli representatives of the ministries of foreign affairs and defense. This enabled me to discuss this research in an informal way and to refine, and sometimes revise, some of the early findings of my research by putting it to test with practitioners.

The plan of the book

Based on the findings of the research, the following is divided into three parts and seven chapters that support the main argument about the enduring salience of the periphery doctrine in Israel's security apparatus. Part I looks at the genesis of the periphery doctrine. In Chapter 1, the historical and theoretical foundations of the concept are our starting point. We explore how the intellectual environment of the early twentieth century influenced the design of the periphery. European diplomatic practices of covert counterbalancing alliances during the nineteenth century played a role that is evidenced here. Indeed, the intrinsically pessimistic belief with regards to Israel's regional environment and the practice of clandestine foreign policy as a means, reveal commonalities with the past European security complex. We then look at the early strategic debates within Zionist circles in the thirties. In particular, we observe the political ideas of Vladimir Jabotinsky, whose pessimistic philosophy greatly inspired Israel's diplomatic posture. This leads us to the first concrete mention of a "periphery doctrine" by politician Baruch Uziel in the early fifties and, approximately at the same time, Reuven Shiloah, an adviser in the inner circle of Prime Minister Ben-Gurion and founder of the Mossad.

Chapter 2 shows how the "periphery doctrine" as an intellectual matrix for the conduct of foreign policy impacted Israel's security establishment, with consequences that go far beyond the mere ideological debate. The periphery strategy did enforce political actors over others – the military and the intelligence services against the diplomats – and did consolidate a mainstream view in the Israeli national security sphere – the zero-sum game mindset and the reliance on clandestine relations.

Part II explores the first period, or first age, of the periphery strategy. In the following chapters (3, 4 and 5) I show how the grand strategy designed earlier led to close but discreet ties with Ethiopia, Turkey, and Iran. I also detail the attempts – which eventually failed – to build bridges with Christian and Kurdish communities in the Arab world. For each case, we highlight the conditions that paved the way to the development of bilateral relations. I also look at the key actors behind the partnerships: the politicians and the armed forces but also external players such as the US, whose support to the Israeli initiative definitely

ensured its acceptance by Turkish, Iranian, and Ethiopian regimes. Finally, the historical perspective allows us to look also at the causes behind the decline of these ties.

This leads us to Part III with two chapters (6 and 7) that deal with the current environment, and more specifically look at the changes and continuities in the periphery strategy. Chapter 6 explains how the periphery remained a powerful intellectual matrix that drove Israeli efforts to replace former allies such as Turkey and Iran by new ones. In other words, Israel's diplomatic and military apparatus adapted to these challenges by using the same intellectual framework to engage with other countries such as Greece and Azerbaijan to replace, respectively, Turkey and Iran. To a certain extent, these latter can be seen as part of the periphery of the periphery. Nevertheless, it is made clear in the analysis that these new partners are of lesser importance to Israel than Turkey and Iran used to be during the first decades of the periphery strategy.

Finally, Chapter 7 looks at the increasing use of the periphery concept in remote places such as in Asia – with Israel's India and China policies – and the Persian Gulf – through the much-speculated, and so far largely overblown, exchanges between Israel and Arab kingdoms. These latest occurrences of the periphery tend to turn the idea into a catch-all concept that is less and less grounded into a geographical frame. At the same time, however, it still reflects the long-term importance of the concept at the level of political imagination.

Notes

1 Founder and leader of the extreme right party, Israel Beytenou ("Israel our Home"), Avigdor Liberman was minister of foreign affairs twice, from February 10, 2009 to December 18, 2012, and from November 11, 2013 to May 6, 2015.
2 Michael Freund, "Fundamentally Freund: Periphery Doctrine's Rebirth," *Jerusalem Post*, August 23, 2012.
3 Yoel Guzansky and Gallia Lindenstrauss, "Revival of the Periphery Concept in Israel's Foreign Policy?," *Strategic Assessment*, Vol. 15, No. 2, July 2012, pp. 27–40, p. 27.
4 Ibid., p. 27.
5 David Turner, "After America Leaves: Israel's 'New' Periphery Doctrine," *Times of Israel*, November 1, 2012.
6 Yossi Alpher, "Israel: Alternative Regional Options in a Changing Middle East," *NOREF Report*, June 2013, p. 1.
7 On the misuses of analogies in foreign policymaking, see Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1992.
8 Interviews with the author in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, January 2012, February 2013, January 2015.
9 On the role of ideas in foreign-policymaking, see among others, Daniel W. Drezner, "Ideas, Bureaucratic Politics, and the Crafting of Foreign Policy," *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 44, No. 4, October 2000, pp. 733–749; Jeffrey Checkel, *Ideas and International Political Change*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1997; Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane, *Ideas and Foreign Policy*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1993; Morton Halperin, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, Washington DC, Brookings Institution, 1974.

10 Interview with an Israeli diplomat, Jerusalem, February 2013.

11 John Bew, *Realpolitik: A History*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2016.

12 Sasson Sofer, *Zionism and the Foundations of Israeli Diplomacy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007; Michael Barnett (Ed.), *Israel in Comparative Perspective*, Albany, SUNY Press, 1996; Gabriel Sheffer and Oren Barak, *Israel's Security Networks: A Theoretical and Comparative Perspective*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013.

13 See among others, Robert O. Freedman (Ed.), *Contemporary Israel: Domestic Politics, Foreign Policy, and Security Challenges*, Boulder, Westview, 2009; Anita Shapira, *Israel: A History*, Waltham, MA, Brandeis University Press, 2014; Fred Khouri, *The Arab–Israel Dilemma*, 3rd ed., Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 1985; Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist–Arab Conflict, 1881–2001*, New York, Vintage, 2001; Mark Tessler, *A History of the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict*, 2nd ed., Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2009; Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, New York, Norton, 2001; Chaim Herzog and Shlomo Gazit, *The Arab–Israeli Wars: War and Peace in the Middle East from the War of Independence through Lebanon*, London, Greenhill, 2004; Ahron Bregman, *Israel's Wars: A History since 1947*, London, Routledge, 2002.

14 See Clive Jones and Tore Petersen (Eds.), *Israel's Clandestine Diplomacies*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013; Howard Patten, *Israel and the Cold War: Diplomacy, Strategy and the Policy of the Periphery at the United Nations*, London, IB Tauris, 2013; Ofra Bengio, *The Turkish–Israeli Relationship: Changing Ties of Middle Eastern Outsiders*, New York, Palgrave, 2010; Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran and the US*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2008.

15 See Michael Brecher, *The Foreign Policy System of Israel: Setting, Images, Process*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1972; Mark Heller, *Continuity and Change in Israeli Security Policy*, London, Routledge, 2000; Alfred Wittstock (Ed.), *The World Facing Israel, Israel Facing the World*, Berlin, Frank & Timme, 2011.

16 Efraim Inbar (Ed.), *Israel's Strategic Agenda*, London, Routledge, 2007, p. vii.

17 Gabriel Sheffer and Oren Barak, *Israel's Security Networks*, op. cit.; Akiva Eldar and Idit Zartal, *The Lords of the Land: The Settlers and the State of Israel 1967–2004*, Or Yehuda, Kineret/Zmora-Bitan, 2005; Charles Freilich, *Zion's Dilemma: How Israel Makes National Security Policy*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2012.

18 Yoram Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room: How the Military Shapes Israeli Policy*, Washington, United States Institute of Peace Press, 2006, p. 8.

19 See on this dimension Sasson Sofer, *Zionism and the Foundations of Israeli Diplomacy*, op. cit.; Michael Barnett (Ed.), *Israel in Comparative Perspective*, op. cit.; Mira Sucharov, *The International Self: Psychoanalysis and the Search for Israeli–Palestinian Peace*, Albany, SUNY Press, 2005; Alain Dieckhoff, *The Invention of a Nation. Zionist Thought and the Making of Modern Israel*, London, Hurst, 2003; Ilan Peleg, "The Zionist Right and Constructivist Realism: Ideological Persistence and Tactical Readjustment," *Israel Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 2005, pp. 127–155; Asher Cohen and Bernard Susser, *Israel and the Politics of Jewish Identity: The Secular–Religious Impasse*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.

20 Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, op. cit.

21 On the practice and value of case studies in social sciences, see Alexander L. George, "Case Study and Theory Development: The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison" in: Paul Gordon Loren (Ed.), *Diplomacy: New Approaches in History, Theory, and Policy*, New York, Free Press, 1979, pp. 61–62; John Gerring, "The Case Study: What It Is and What It Does" in: Carles Boix and Susan Stokes (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 90–123.

Part I

The genesis of the periphery doctrine

This first part of our investigation looks at the origins of the periphery doctrine. More precisely, I describe in the following pages the itinerary of the concept from its intellectual foundations to its inception into Israel's security establishment. The core argument here is that the designing of such a foreign policy approach had ramifications in the whole policy apparatus. In other words, because the doctrine gained traction among the political elite, in particular Prime Minister Ben-Gurion and his close advisors, it percolated into the political–military system and became so ingrained in the routines of decision-makers that it eventually impacted the internal balance of powers between the military, the intelligence services and the ministry of foreign affairs. In that perspective, studying the periphery doctrine provides us with insights not only regarding the geopolitics of Israel but regarding the dynamics of its policymaking as well.

The story of the periphery and its inception into the Israeli foreign policy matrix is one that reflects on the interaction between ideas, interests and institutions.[1] More than a century ago, the political scientist, Arthur Bentley, underlined "the only reality of ideas is their reflection of the groups, only that and nothing more."[2] This means that studying the "periphery" without specifying its historical context, its underlying philosophy and its promoters in the nascent Israeli political system would miss the point. Uncovering the historical background behind the "periphery" relates to the basic principles of scholarship on intellectual history.[3] It also means that the "periphery" concept has to be conceived as an element of Israel's national security culture[4] and identity.[5] According to Michael Barnett, Israel's identity-building derives from three factors: religion, nationalism – through the form of Zionism – and the Holocaust.[6] Israel's founders built their national identity on the remembrance of the Jews' persecution by Western countries and the theological link between a community and a land. Mira Sucharov also demonstrates in her work that from the outset, Israel built its identity as the one of a "defensive warrior" fighting an existential battle against hostile neighbors.[7] Therefore, geopolitical concepts such as the periphery have to be analyzed in that context, to precisely understand how both geographic facts and national security culture produced it.

In that perspective, Israeli policymakers designed and implemented this periphery alliance by relying on the perception of threats to their country and to their

identity. True, it was significantly influenced by objective factors such as Egyptian or Syrian military power, the limited natural resources of Israel and the difficult access to regional imports because of the hostility from its direct neighbors. But, ideas mattered too: Israeli leaders looked at pan Arabism as a major ideological threat that they frequently painted as a new form of Nazism.[8]

As a result, our first chapter details the emergence of the "periphery" as a foreign policy concept. Merely defined as a means to counter the threat of pan Arabism, the doctrine is in many ways influenced by European diplomatic practices from the nineteenth century. Historically, such an approach has been associated with the German concept *realpolitik*, in opposition to liberalism or idealism.[9] Later, in the early stages of the establishment of modern Israel, the doctrine closely related to Vladimir Jabotinsky's idea of an "iron wall." The pessimistic and rather offensive philosophy of Jabotinsky provided the intellectual background to the concept. This concept was then formulated and promoted by two very different figures of the early days of the Jewish State: the politician Baruch Uziel and the founder of Mossad Reuven Shiloah.

Of these two figures, Shiloah was by far the most influential and the most instrumental one to put into practice the logic of the periphery as it was evidenced by the central role he played in the making of the rapprochement between Israel and Ethiopia, Turkey, and Iran. But, Shiloah's logic had major consequences on the foreign policymaking in Israel. The counter-alliance narrative driving the agenda had its own limitations as it reduced the scope of the relations to the existence of a common threat. It nurtured a zero-sum game mindset that would sometimes prove inadequate. It created caveats with Turkish and Iranian leaders that all along remained concerned not to antagonize neighboring Arab rulers. Furthermore, Shiloah's approach favored security ties sustained in a clandestine setting and as a result it gave the upper hand to the armed forces and the intelligence services over the ministry of foreign affairs. In a certain way, the periphery doctrine was to epitomize the structural troubles of the making of foreign policy in Israel by highlighting the imbalance between the diplomats and the military.

Notes

1 On these three factors, see the literature on the making of public policies: Michael Hill, *The Public Policy Process*, London, Longman, 2009; Giandomenico Majone, "Public Policy and Administration: Ideas, Interests and Institutions" in: Robert Goodin and Hans-Dieter Klingemann (Eds.), *A New Handbook of Political Science*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 610–628.
2 Arthur Bentley, *The Process of Government*, Cambridge, Belknap Press, 1967 (1908), p. 169.
3 On the influences regarding this methodological approach, see Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 1969, pp. 3–53; Duncan Bell, "Political Theory and the Function of Intellectual History: A Response to Emmanuel Navon," *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1, January 2003, pp. 151–160; David Armitage, *Foundations of Modern International Thought*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013.

4 I use the expression "culture" here in the sense of Peter Katzenstein,

>   as a broad label that denotes collective models of nation-state authority or identity, carried by custom or law. Culture refers to both a set of evaluative standards (such as norms and values) and a set of cognitive standards (such as rules and models) that define what social actors exist in a system, how they operate, and how they relate to one another.

   "Introduction" in: Peter Katzenstein (Ed.), *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1996, p. 6.
5 On the role of identity in international relations, see Shibley Telhami and Michael Barnett (Eds.), *Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East*, Cornell, Cornell University Press, 2002.
6 Michael Barnett, "Identity and Alliances in the Middle East" in: Peter Katzenstein, (Ed.), *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1996, p. 434.
7 Mira Sucharov, *The International Self: Psychoanalysis and the Search for Israeli–Palestinian Peace*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2005, p. 41.
8 See Israel Gershoni (Ed.), *Arab Responses to Fascism and Nazism: Attraction and Repulsion*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 2014.
9 John Bew, *Realpolitik: A History*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2016.

1 The intellectual foundations of the periphery

No concept appears *ex-nihilo*. The emergence of the periphery doctrine therefore can be understood as the combination of several interrelated factors. The historical and intellectual backgrounds help us to understand the conditions that prevailed for the development of the concept. To explore the genesis of the periphery, we start by characterizing its theoretical foundations. In many ways, the concept derives from a worldview shaped by nineteenth-century European statesmanship commonly summarized by the expression *realpolitik*.

Because of its emphasis on balance of power, security and national interest, it could be qualified as realist, in the sense of international relations theory. Although there is no unique definition of realism, common themes among the scholarship include power politics, survival and self-help policies that echo the periphery concept.[1] A word of caution is needed though: I use the conditional here and in the following pages as none of the early supporters of the periphery doctrine called themselves realists. Indeed, it would be misleading to assume that Israeli policymakers had any theoretical ambitions behind their agenda.

This leads us to specify the backdrop: first, European diplomatic practices during the nineteenth century, also known as the era of balance of power, influenced Israeli policymakers; second, the pessimistic philosophy developed by Zionist thinkers such as Vladimir Jabotinsky ingrained Israel's national security identity as well. In the third section, I look more specifically at two individuals who played a major role in the Israeli political system during the fifties to finally put the idea of the periphery at the forefront of the policy agenda: a politician, Baruch Uziel, and an intelligence officer, Reuven Shiloah.

European approaches of balance of power

The periphery doctrine surfaced in the policy realm in the late fifties, but its genesis started a few decades earlier. Like most political ideas, it was the result of the intellectual environment of its time.[2] This included the debates among Zionist founders, and the influence of European diplomatic practices in the nineteenth century. The international environment shaped the intellectual foundations of the doctrine; it influenced its pessimistic approach and its inclination for the mechanism of balancing threats.

The first obvious inspiration behind the approach was the concept of *realpolitik* that emerged as the central approach to diplomatic practices from the nineteenth century. Europe's *realpolitik* was an influence for the Israeli logic in the sense that it constituted the cultural backdrop of the Zionist thinkers. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, balance of power was the primary if not the unique philosophy of politics that the European diplomats aimed to apply.[3] Neither an international body nor regional organizations were regulating European affairs. Statesmen were proceeding their own way and protecting their leeway by avoiding long-term commitments. After the Congress of Vienna in 1814–1815, Austria and the United Kingdom balanced against Russia and France. Later, London settled its dispute with Paris and Saint Petersburg to contain the new rising power, Germany. As Lord Palmerston, the emblematic British Prime Minister of the nineteenth century famously stated: "We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow."[4] Likewise, Winston Churchill later summarized: "For four hundred years the foreign policy of England has been to oppose the strongest, most aggressive, most dominating power on the Continent."[5]

Balancing was more than a reactive measure to an imminent threat, it was a diplomatic philosophy. In his doctoral dissertation turned book, *A World Restored*, Henry Kissinger portrayed the European games of balance of power in the first part of the nineteenth century as a template for modern Statesmen. Kissinger saw the diplomatic efforts of the Austrian Chancellor Metternich and the British Foreign Secretary Castlereagh at the Congress of Vienna as evidence that realism, not idealism, was to dictate diplomatic decisions. For instance, he quoted Metternich writing in his political testament:

> My point of departure is the quiet contemplation of the affairs of this world, not those of the other of which I know nothing and which are the object of faith which is in strict opposition to knowledge […] In the social world […] one must act cold-bloodedly based on observation and without hatred or prejudice.[6]

This approach was discredited by American president Woodrow Wilson in the aftermath of the First World War. In his famous "Fourteen Points" speech given on January 8, 1918, Wilson discredited European secret diplomacies and perceived them as the root causes for the conflict. He supported the creation of a League of Nations whose aim was to render secret alliances obsolete. Nevertheless, faced with successive crises in the thirties and the withdrawal of the Axis powers, the League ultimately failed to prevent the Second World War. These were the years the Zionist movement grew. Because of the suspicion international regulatory mechanisms such as the League caused in Zionist circles, a European balancing system was seen as a tangible option. It avoided the misleading optimism of Wilsonianism to prefer the *realpolitik* approach of the nineteenth century.

Jabotinsky and the iron wall

Another key aspect to understand the emergence of the periphery doctrine was the fundamental rift among Zionist leaders in the thirties regarding the place of Israel in a future Middle East regional system. One man in particular played a seminal role in the development of Israel's national security culture: Vladimir Jabotinsky.

Living from 1880 to 1940, Jabotinsky was not as central as other key figures in the history of Zionism (Theodore Herzl, Chaim Weizmann, and David Ben-Gurion) but he undoubtedly remains one of the major intellectual influences to understand not only Israel's periphery doctrine but its whole foreign policy approach. One reason behind the limited visibility of Jabotinsky was his controversial character. A leader of the revisionist Zionist camp in the thirties, Jabotinsky was born in Odessa in a liberal Jewish family. He first worked as a journalist in Rome and Vienna. His time in Europe during that period left a significant influence on his political thinking and he strongly believed the Jewish identity to be part of Western culture.[7] He was highly involved in the development of the Hebraic culture as he translated the work of the poet Bialik from Hebrew into Russian and the poetry of Dante and Edgar Allan Poe into Hebrew. In 1921, he became elected member of the World Zionist Organization (WZO). Soon he was identified as a charismatic orator. However, his incendiary style caused troubles in the ranks, in particularly on the left side and more importantly it antagonized Chaim Weizmann, the president of the WZO. Tensions increased further when Weizmann accepted the British demand in 1922 to withdraw the emirate of Transjordan from the map of the potential national homeland for the Jews of Palestine. Jabotinsky considered Weizmann's decision ill-suited and detrimental to the Zionist project. Historians also underline the cultural difference between Jabotinsky and the leadership of the WZO as an element of the dispute. Contrary to them, Jabotinsky had been exposed to European politics, in Italy and Austria, and as a result, he perceived anti-Semitism as deeply ingrained in the European societies.[8]

The tensions increased when the "Petlioura" affair erupted and led to the breakup of ties between the WZO and Jabotinsky in early 1923. Simon Petlioura was the head of the separatist government in Ukraine and approached Jabotinsky to discuss the creation of a "Jewish gendarmerie" that could be in charge of protecting the Jewish community against soviet troops. Jabotinsky approved the project without prior consultation with the WZO. But more than the decision-making issue, Petlioura was a controversial character as he was himself involved in the massacres of Jews only two years before. The "Petlioura" affair triggered an internal investigation and forced Jabotinsky to leave the WZO.[9]

On November 4, 1923, only a few months after this crisis, Jabotinsky published an article for the Russian-written magazine *Rasswyet* ("Dawn") titled "The Iron Wall." This short piece is an open condemnation of the strategy adopted by the WZO vis-à-vis the Arab population. Excerpts illustrate the violence of Jabotinsky's rhetoric. He asserts that "voluntary reconciliation between

the Palestinian Arabs and us is absolutely out of the question, whether now or in a foreseeable future."[10] Later, Jabotinsky mocks "those blind from birth" who did not accept "the complete impossibility of getting voluntary consent from the Arabs of Palestine to the transformation of that Palestine from an Arabic country into a country with a Jewish majority."[11]

Jabotinsky accused the left side of the Zionist movement of dangerous leniency toward the Arabs. In the early years of the Zionist movement, Jewish leaders such as Ahad Ha'am and Rabbi Benjamin (an alias for Yehoshua Redler-Feldman) had condemned the mistreatment of Arab workers by Jewish farmers. The writer Dov-Ber Borochov, a mentor of Ben-Gurion, portrayed the Arabs from Palestine as descendants of the ancient Jews who had later converted to Christianity and then Islam.[12] According to Jabotinsky, this expectation for accommodation was based on a fundamentally skewed and naïve vision of the Middle East by the liberal Zionists.

Beyond the Jewish–Arab relations, Jabotinsky's philosophy had been heavily influenced by his personal account of the First World War and his profound skepticism for diplomatic arrangements. In 1916, he wrote that "not for a long time has humanity been shown so clearly that "everything is possible"; that principles, agreements, promises, progress, traditions, liberty, humanity are all rot and rust and rubbish."[13] In certain ways, Jabotinsky's critics echoed the realist call from Metternich quoted by Kissinger to abandon the ideal world and to adapt to the real world, at least in the way that they perceive it to be. Again in his article "The Iron Wall," Jabotinsky evoked the potential regional environment of the future Hebrew State. He dismissed the idea of a settlement with Arab neighbors as an "unrealistic dream," considering that the leaderships in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, or Syria would not consider the Jews able to offer them political or financial compensation in return for Palestine.[14] In the end, Jabotinsky did conclude that peaceful coexistence was conceivable but only after the "iron wall" had been established and deterred the Arabs from attacking Israel. Cooperation tomorrow required show of force today, or as Jabotinsky wrote "the only way for us to an agreement in the future is absolute rejection of all attempts at an agreement in the present."[15]

Jabotinsky's text soon became a reference for the followers of his organization called the revisionist movement, founded in 1925. The movement implied stronger pressure on the United Kingdom, demands such as one Jewish state on both banks of the Jordan River, reestablishment of Jewish regiments and military training for youth. Meanwhile, on the left side of the movement, his prose was described as immoral and denying the right of Arabs to self-determination.[16] Though in fact, Jabotinsky's thinking progressively shaped Israel's foreign policy debate. Historian Avi Shlaim highlighted it:

> in the realm of ideas, Jabotinsky was important as the founder of Revisionist Zionism. In the realm of politics his impact was much greater than is commonly realized. For it was not only Revisionist Zionists who were influenced by his ideas but the Zionist movement as a whole.[17]

Many decades after the publication of "The Iron Wall," David Ben-Gurion, historically a political enemy of Jabotinsky, used a similar rhetoric to define Israel's policy vis-à-vis its Arab neighbors. In 1953, he explained to a young Special Forces commander named Ariel Sharon:[18] "the only thing that matters is that we can exist here on the land of our forefathers and unless we show the Arabs that there is a high price to pay for murdering Jews, we won't survive."[19] In a similar fashion, Shimon Peres wrote in his essay *David's Sling* in 1970:

> Israel's security problem is unique. It is compounded of several ingredients, all of them unusual. Its prime feature is the totality of Arab hostility. […] The Arabs do not seek just one particular portion of Israel's land, sources of water, oil wells; they are not interested only in political advantage or economic domination. The Arab purpose is all-absorptive – the destruction of Israel and the annihilation or banishment of her inhabitants […] No compromise can satisfy them. It is the Arab goal to abolish Israel, not to change a political situation.[20]

We see here how these statements resonate with Jabotinsky's thinking. Through his concept of an "iron wall," he depicted an image that epitomized the future Israeli strategic culture. The gradual clashes between Arab and Jewish communities in the thirties and then the war of 1948 gave texture to Jabotinsky's message. It engendered the belief that peace with the Arabs was impossible. It left Israeli politicians and decision-makers with a deep feeling of permanent insecurity and the urgent need to establish a quasi-absolute defense of the country. In that perspective, Jabotinsky's legacy became visible in Israeli strategic culture, both at the military and the diplomatic levels.[21]

Starting in the late forties, Israel's strategic culture was shaped by constraints such as the absence of strategic depth and scarce manpower that left the country at the mercy of protracted conflicts. Because of these conditions, long wars would put the existence of the State at stake. To bypass these elements, Israeli leaders opted for offensive doctrines enabling the launching of pre-emptive campaigns that would swiftly move the battles to the territory of the enemies. Even though the reality of an existential threat coming from Arab conventional armies vanished after the 1967 war, this scenario still remained a key driver of Israeli military planning process in the following decades. In a 1989 book dedicated to the offense–defense debate in Israel, Ariel Levite stressed this strong inclination among military planners for an offensive posture: "this attitude is characterized by contempt for defensive operations, heavy emphasis on the ephemeral nature of the defensive battle, and a surprising degree of ignorance regarding the doctrinal characteristics or the internal logic of defensive operations."[22]

From that perspective, Israel's military strategy followed Hobbesian – or realist – logic: to survive against its rivals, the Israeli State had to become the military hegemon in the Middle East.[23] In many ways, it was a military translation of Jabotinsky's idea.[24] His view of Israel as a citadel under siege had not been left to the political fringes: it spread across the political spectrum and exacerbated through the experience of multiple regional conflicts.[25]

In the foundational years of Israel, Jabotinsky's revisionism built a continuum between nationalism and foreign policy that approached the principles of political realism.[26] After him, other revisionist leaders such as Avraham Stern (1907–1942) advocated for Zionist *realpolitik* with an emphasis on the role of power and conquest to secure the existence of the nascent Jewish State.[27] The corollary of this posture at the diplomatic level was a traditional defiance for arrangements and international agreements perceived as liabilities. Jabotinsky's legacy implied disdain for peace efforts with the Arab world and overreliance on defensive and offensive measures against hostility from the neighbors. This is where the "periphery" doctrine entered into play. In other words, Israel's primacy in the Middle East would not only rely on the build-up of an overwhelming military might but also on an alliance strategy that would overcome Israel's isolation and counterbalances its direct threats. The periphery doctrine was a by-product of Jabotinsky's concept of an "iron wall" and over the years and decades, it would expand its logic with concrete political consequences.

Two founders of the periphery

Selecting a specific date of birth for the concept of "periphery" is a delicate exercise. When asked on the history of the doctrine, one Israeli diplomat in Jerusalem argued "there is no 'periphery doctrine' per se in the sense that you would be able to get an official document, a guide or a textbook that you could quote."[28] The methodological challenge then becomes to acknowledge the pertinence of the concept in the discourse of actors without being able to designate a specific date or a particular document that would mark the emergence of the concept. Despite this caveat, we can argue with certainty that the debate among politicians and strategists grew in earnest in the second half of the fifties.

Two men played a key role in the birth and development of the "periphery" concept: Baruch Uziel and Reuven Shiloah. The exact role each played remains till this day the object of debates among historians but each, in his own way, actively supported a foreign policy project that resembled the alliance Ben-Gurion and his government would start implementing by the late fifties.

According to Tel Aviv University scholar Ofra Bengio, Baruch Uziel was the first to formulate the idea of a "periphery."[29] However, it is worth noting that Baruch Uziel is not always credited by historians and observers for his role in the periphery debate. He is not even mentioned once in a recent book dedicated to the "periphery" by Yossi Alpher, a former intelligence officer from the Mossad.[30] Born and raised in Thessaloniki in 1901, Uziel left for Palestine in 1913. He was there when the First World War started and as a Greek citizen, was exiled to Syria by the Ottoman authorities in 1917. After the fall of the Ottomans and their replacement by the British forces, Uziel moved back to Palestine and became a lawyer in Jerusalem.[31]

It is at this moment that he started giving lectures in Jerusalem on the regional policy of the future Hebrew State. Uziel was arguing that facing the threat from a united Arab front, Israel would have to establish ties with non-Arab countries

in the region but moreover with minorities within the Arab world.[32] In 1948, he specified his thought in a memorandum addressed to the new Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and published an essay in the journal, *Beterem*, closely associated with the Mapai Party. In Uziel's words, to counter the Arab threat, Israel shall build an alliance of minorities to include not only Jews but also "the Maronites from Lebanon, the Alawis in Syria, the Turks, the Greeks, the Armenians, the Kurds, the Assyrians and the Persians."[33] Uziel's project was ambitious to say the least but the author strongly believed it constituted the sole means to pacify the Middle East. In that perspective, Uziel's thinking relied on the same intellectual foundations as Jabotinsky's ideas: the Arabs cannot live in peace with Israel unless the latter does not leave them the choice and make the military option irrelevant for these neighboring foes.

Later, Uziel became a member of the Liberal Party where he kept promoting his vision. Eventually, he wrote a short book in Hebrew in 1959 titled *The Periphery Alliance: A Suggestion for Israel's Policy*.[34] Interestingly, it was published a year after Prime Minister Ben-Gurion had initiated the clandestine relations with Ethiopia, Iran, and Turkey. Historians are still discussing the possibility of Uziel being aware of the pact the Israeli government had been implementing but the extreme confidentiality that surrounded Ben-Gurion's initiative excluded the Knesset from its development. The diplomatic archives that I accessed from this period do not mention his name. Therefore, there are strong reasons to believe that although Uziel may have suspected the existence of talks, he did not know their extent. But this is also the reason why the similarity between Uziel's essay and the policy conducted by Ben-Gurion is remarkable.

Uziel believed this periphery alliance would increase the trade relations, establish diplomatic bridges with regional partners, and reinforce the global legitimacy of the country. In his view, it would pave the way to the normalization of Israel and sustain ties with foreign Jewish communities. The most significant difference with the actual strategy was Uziel's expectations of a public diplomacy. Contrary to his plan, clandestine channels were chosen by decision-makers and it may be argued that this option did not help with reinforcing the global legitimacy Uziel hoped for with the strategy. This choice might have been due to the fact that Ben-Gurion's initiative was carried on by members of the intelligence community, specifically Reuven Shiloah.

It is Reuven Shiloah who, according to the former Mossad operative, Yossi Alpher, first coined the expression "periphery doctrine" (*torat haperipheria*). A key figure of Israel's clandestine diplomacy and the first director of the Mossad, Shiloah was born in Jerusalem in 1909. He adhered very early to the Zionist cause and joined the ranks of the Haganah. In 1931, aged 22 years old, he started traveling to Iraq and Kurdistan. During the three following years, he would visit the country extensively to build and organize the networks for the Jewish emigration to Palestine.[35] In Iraqi Kurdistan, Shiloah developed ties with Kurdish leaders and came to the realization that the support of Middle Eastern minorities could prove crucial in the existential struggle for Israel. Shiloah perceived Kurdish forces as potential allies against Arab nationalists while he saw the

influence of the Jewish community on the Iraqi press in the thirties as an asset.[36] However, Iraqi authorities soon became suspicious of Shiloah's activities in the country and asked him to leave in July 1934.[37] Nevertheless, the Iraqi experience left an enduring impression on Shiloah and he would always see non-Arab forces in the Middle East as regional actors worth engaging with. At the same time, his inclination for secrecy also influenced his vision of these ties. In the regional climate of intrigue, public diplomacy was definitely not fashionable; clandestinity was the norm. In the years that led to the establishment of Israel, Shiloah was not only an adviser of David Ben-Gurion, but he was also reported to be a close friend. There was therefore no surprise when in December 1949, Prime Minister Ben-Gurion created the Central Institute for Coordination, the Mossad, and appointed as its first Director the man who had been urging him to build an intelligence agency: Reuven Shiloah.

After his tenure at the Mossad, another international experience played a decisive role in shaping Shiloah's approach of the periphery. In the early fifties, he was assigned to the Israeli Embassy to the US in Washington, where he became a close advisor to Ambassador Abba Eban. Interestingly, in his memoirs, Eban describes Shiloah as follows:

> His formal rank has never fully expressed his complex personality. He is popularly and accurately known as the first architect of Israel's Intelligence system […] Reuven watched over the development of the Intelligence Community with relentless zeal from its early beginnings. He was willing to work anonymously to the ultimate point of exhaustion, and gave Ben-Gurion his blind allegiance and total service.[38]

At that time, the US was trying to counter the rising soviet influence in the Middle East. On January 5, 1957, President Eisenhower delivered a proposal to the US Congress calling for a more active US policy in the region to confront the "increased danger from International Communism."[39] Shiloah quickly understood the added value of the periphery strategy under that framework. The strategy would not only allow Israel to counter the hostility of its Arab neighbors, it would also make the country a geopolitical pivot in the region and a precious ally for the US.[40] In other words, the Israeli doctrine could support the US containment strategy that President Eisenhower started implementing by 1957.[41] It is indeed at this specific moment that Ben-Gurion made use of Shiloah's ideas and conducted a bold initiative of rapprochement with Turkey, Iran and Ethiopia.

As a mark of trust and acknowledgment, Ben-Gurion made Shiloah the head of the delegations that met with Turkish, Iranian and Ethiopian counterparts to discuss the content of these nascent relations. After decades of maturation, the periphery doctrine had gained traction and would be launched in hastiness in the years 1957–1958. From June 28 to July 2, 1958, Shiloah, as the head of the Israeli delegation, met the Turkish team in Rome to seal the partnership. Only two weeks after, the Iraqi monarchy, by then a US ally and a member, alongside

Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey, of the Baghdad Pact, collapsed following a coup led by Abdul Salam Areef and Abdul Karim Qasim. Suddenly Shiloah's project would become a critical initiative to protect Israel against the looming pan Arab threat.

Both Shiloah and Uziel played a role in the promotion of the idea of the periphery doctrine. In two different ways, they raised the awareness of Israel's geopolitical options, Uziel by lecturing and writing about it and Shiloah by operating secretly abroad and advising Ben-Gurion closely. Although Shiloah was an intelligence operative, he was, like Uziel, a man of ideas. Some of his critics even portrayed him as "an idea man on a mission, and unsuited to the administrative details of secret work."[42] That does not make either of the two a scholar and it is evidenced by the limited effort they dedicated to the theoretical contours of the periphery strategy. It was to be a policy with a simple purpose, not a nicely crafted concept with subtleties detached from realities.

In retrospect, Shiloah and Uziel could not foresee the deep ramifications their ideas would have on Israel's security apparatus. As Israel was celebrating its first decade of existence, the doctrine would mark a turning point, not only in Israel's regional policy, but also in the making of its national security establishment.

The periphery, a case of realism?

Where does the periphery fit into the theory of international relations? Admittedly, the concept was intended for a policy audience and its content excludes lengthy theoretical developments. The argument behind the periphery doctrine was a simple one: the enemy of my enemy may be my friend. In the case of Israel, it translated into a geopolitical map where the enemies are the close Arab neighbors (Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon) and the potential allies are the distant regional powers (Turkey, Iran, Ethiopia); hence the periphery. The concept stressed the sense of geographical isolation by Israel. It also had ethnic implications as the doctrine – at least in its first appearance – relied on the principle that Arabs were intrinsically hostile to Israel and that consequently potential partners could only be among non-Arab countries in the Middle East.

This argument reflects a foreign policy approach that emphasizes the friend-enemy distinction as its guiding rule.[43] Various aspects of the concept echo theories of international relations, in particular the different forms of realism. Realism generally argues that peace is a fabricated state, and that only war is the natural regulator of interactions among the powers. In our case, the periphery idea gained traction because of the skepticism from Israeli officials regarding the capacity of the international system, namely the United Nations, to regulate its disputes with Arab neighbors. Realism also puts a special emphasis on military power that resonates with the Israeli approach.[44] As a consequence, the actors – States – seek survival by becoming more powerful or by preventing the closest competitor from getting stronger. The paradigm generates numerous sub-theories that rely on these core assumptions. It builds the idea that international relations are a zero-sum game and the strategies to play this game eventually create the

image of balance of power: a system loosely regulated in which the distribution and opposition of forces among nations prevents any of them to impose its will on the others.

Specifically, the idea of preventing Arab domination by siding with other competing regional players – whether Turkey, Iran, or Ethiopia – reminds us of the principle of "external balancing" introduced by Kenneth Waltz.[45] Waltz explained that strategies pursued by the actors are based on the structure of the international system and the constraints it imposes on them. Waltz's theory holds that to prevent domination by a hostile country, a State has two options: either balancing this threat internally (by increasing its economic and military capabilities) or externally (forming an alliance with other actors against the first one).[46]

Waltz's logic of "external balancing" clearly transpires in the Israeli appraisal of Middle East power plays in the fifties. Let us, for instance, read the words of Shimon Peres – one of its key Statesmen who was involved in the first years of the periphery project. In an essay titled *David's Sling* and published in 1970, Peres details the rationale for Israel's rapprochement with Turkey and Iran:

> The policy of Nasser left Turkey and Iran with no choice, and they felt constrained to set limits to his ambitions and neutralize the threats which poured forth from the Voice of Cairo. […] The prospect of a new, ambitious, Arab "caliph," supported by the might of a suspect power, could hardly fail to rouse unhappy memories among the Turks and Iranians of dark periods in their history. […] Thus, it was the danger from Egypt which prompted the cooperation between Israel and these two non-Arab States.[47]

Peres's argument is straightforward: Turkey, Iran, and Israel allied to balance the fear of a new "Arab caliph." Such rapprochement aimed to contain the spread of pan-Arabism in the region by impacting the distribution of power. Without military and intelligence cooperation with the Turks and the Iranians, Israelis felt they would have been left isolated against the Egyptian pressures.

Going further, this Israeli logic echoes Stephen Walt's concept of balance-of-threat, which implies that States will seek to balance against threats. In his seminal work *Origins of Alliances*, Walt revisits the key concept of balancing in the realist school of thought and amends it. He argues that in the international system, players balance threats, rather than power. The author then identifies four criteria impacting the level of threat posed by a State: "although the distribution of power is an extremely important factor, the level of threat is also affected by geographic proximity, offensive capabilities, and perceived intentions."[48]

According to Walt, States facing a stronger power have two choices: either forming alliance to protect themselves and prevent the domination of the competitor – balancing – or to align themselves with the latter – bandwagoning.[49] Based on a survey of the modern history of the Middle East, Walt comes to the conclusion that balancing is far more common than bandwagoning. Walt explains that "to ally with the dominant power means placing one's trust in its

continued benevolence. The safer strategy is to join with those who cannot readily dominate their allies, in order to avoid being dominated by those who can."[50] The theory acutely depicts how the periphery doctrine of the late fifties was implemented due to the rising threat Nasser and his pan-Arab project constituted to Turkey, Iran, and Ethiopia. The distinction between perceived threat and concrete power enables us to better understand the Israeli motivation. The fears caused by Nasser's rhetoric drove the efforts behind the periphery policy, as much as the actual Egyptian military power did.

All in all, the periphery strategy reflects commonalities with theoretical realism. In both cases, survival and self-help are prominent themes. States fight for their existence whereas the Jewish people built, in the official Israeli narrative, a homeland to protect itself from persecution. Back in 2003, contemplating the theoretical foundations of Israeli foreign policy, Dov Waxman concluded,

> realism's depiction of foreign policy as geared towards state survival in an anarchic, ruthlessly competitive inter-state environment […] appears to characterize Israeli foreign policy as it seeks to defend Israel's existence in a region where diplomatic niceties and international norms are all-too-often regarded as dangerous luxuries.[51]

This echoes the national narrative of "defensive warriors" that Zionist founders developed.[52] But it also evidences the limitation of realist scholarship to explain the periphery strategy. Realism argues that small states like Israel design their foreign policy according to external constraints – threats and potential allies – but it does not really take into consideration how the perception of this environment can be influenced by a national strategic culture. In this sense, Zionist political thinking and the Israeli narrative of "defensive warriors" impacted, as much as the regional power plays, the way Ben-Gurion and his cabinet perceived their policy options.

Political ideas – from the initial Zionist debates to Baruch Uziel – and the regional environment combined to shape Israel's strategic culture. Eventually, the fact that there was no official document setting the periphery doctrine out could suggest that Israeli policymakers believed it was their only option, a natural option given the context. This orientation might have seemed natural if one looked at the Middle East in the mid-fifties but it had significant and enduring consequences for the national security establishment.

Notes

 1 See Roger Spegele, *Political Realism in International Theory*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996; Jack Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000.
 2 On the importance of the historical context in the analysis of political ideas, see Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 1969, pp. 3–53.

3 Edward Gulick, *Europe's Classical Balance of Power: A Case History of the Theory and Practice of One of the Great Concepts of European Statecraft*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1955.

4 Quoted in: Henry Kissinger, *World Order*, New York, Penguin Press, 2014, p. 46.

5 Winston Churchill, *The Second World War, Vol. 1: The Gathering Storm*, Boston, 1948, pp. 207–2008.

6 Quoted in: Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace, 1812–22*, New York, Mariner Book, 1973, p. 10.

7 Ilan Greilsammer, *Le sionisme*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2005, p. 82.

8 Hillel Halkin, *Jabotinsky: A Life*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2014.

9 On the context of the "Petlioura" affair, see Simon Markish, "Quand Vladimir Jabotinsky était parisien," *Archives juives*, Vol. 36, No. 1, 2003, pp. 70–88.

10 Vladimir Jabotinsky, *The Iron Wall (We and the Arabs)*, 1923. It was first published in Russian under the title *O Zheleznoi Stene* in Rassvyet, November 4, 1923. It was later published in English in the *Jewish Herald* (South Africa), on November 26, 1937. The document is taken from Eran Kaplan and Derek Penslar, *The Origins of Israel, 1882–1948*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 2011, p. 258.

11 Ibid., p. 258.

12 Anita Shapira, *Israel: A History*, Waltham, Brandeis University Press, 2014, p. 53.

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32 Ofra Bengio, *The Turkish–Israeli Relationship*, op. cit., p. 33.
33 Baruch Uziel, "The Peripheral Alliance" [in Hebrew], *Beterem*, November 1948, pp. 8–11.
34 Baruch Uziel, *The Peripheral Alliance: A Suggestion for Israeli Policy* [in Hebrew], Tel Aviv, Hamerkaz, 1959.
35 An official biography of Reuven Shiloah can be found on the website of the Mossad: www.mossad.gov.il/eng/history/Pages/Reuven-Shiloah.aspx. Accessed on July 17, 2015.
36 Haggai Eshed, *Reuven Shiloah: The Man behind the Mossad*, New York, Frank Cass, 1997, p. 17.
37 Ibid., p. 17.
38 Abba Eban, *Personal Witness: Israel through my Eyes*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1992, p. 33.
39 Speech by President Dwight Eisenhower, January 5, 1957. Available at: www.eisenhower.archives.gov/…/speeches. Accessed on April 20, 2016.
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41 John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 125.
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43 See Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996, p. 26.
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45 Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, New York, Waveland Press, 1979, p. 118; On the notion of *balancing* see, Arnold Wolfers, "The Balance of Power in Theory and Practice" in: Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962, pp. 122–124; Stephen Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1987.
46 Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, op. cit., p. 125.
47 Shimon Peres, *David's Sling*, op. cit., p. 153.
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2   The shaping of Israel's security establishment

Grand strategies like the periphery doctrine are sometimes perceived as ideas that merely infuse the efforts of a government. Although this view is attractive, it does not illustrate the reality of policymaking where grand strategies should rather be seen as a token in a bargaining process connecting multiple actors with distinct interests. In his seminal *Modern Strategy*, Colin Gray points out the usual bias when it comes to studying ideas and policies. Gray underlines the ways in which institutional processes alter the initial purpose of a strategy: "Just as strategy is 'done' by tactical activity, also it is, or should be, 'done' by a bureaucratic organization that staffs alternatives critically, coordinates rival inputs, and oversees execution and feedback on the effect of execution."[1]

Consequently, the salience of a concept in the decision-making process not only derives from its policy relevance but also from the position of its promoters in the political system. In other words, ideas are put on the agenda because their advocates were powerful enough to do so. The other way around, dominant ideas reflect dominant players in the political process. In that perspective, tracking the development and the implementation of a concept like the periphery doctrine opens up a perspective on the security policymaking in Israel. Over the years, the adoption of a periphery approach translated into strategic priorities, policy preferences, and eventual bureaucratic battles over the leading agency. Indeed, it is usually neglected by the contemporary Middle East commentators that the "periphery" played a major role in shaping Israel's foreign policy, particularly in defining the rivalries between the military and the intelligence on one side and the diplomats on the other side.

This chapter starts where the previous one ended: when the periphery percolated into the Israeli political system. The concept initially designed by Shiloah and Uziel built into a matrix that became so ingrained in the national security apparatus that till this day, the Israeli establishment would look at their relations with neighboring countries through this framework. The periphery created a phenomenon that public policy theory calls "path dependence."[2] Despite internal and external crises, the path shaped by the concept continued to be used as if it was the inevitable solution. Therefore, I show here how the implementation of the periphery strategy impacted the system at three levels: the actors, the

processes and the ideas. First, the periphery provided leverage to the Israel Defense Forces and the Mossad to act as foreign-policymakers. Second, it ensured the prevalence of clandestine ties over public bilateral relations, of military-intelligence cooperation over broader diplomatic interactions. Third, it exacerbated Israel's deterministic feeling of isolation by institutionalizing a zero-sum game mindset in the conduct of foreign policy.

The periphery and its actors

Following David Ben-Gurion's decision to launch the periphery alliance, the leading agency for its implementation was the Mossad whose acting director was Reuven Shiloah. The other government bodies, such as the Israel Defense Forces or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, would act as supporting actors. Former intelligence officer Yossi Alpher confirms in his book dedicated to the periphery that the implementation of the strategy fell under the responsibility of the Mossad. He recognizes that "foreign and defense ministries were aware of periphery activities and operations on a need-to-know basis" but for the most part, the intelligence officers defined the framework.[3] When deemed appropriate, they would involve the armed forces and the diplomats but overall they remained the guardians of the doctrine. This logically exacerbated the climate of secrecy that surrounded the policy.

In that sense, the implementation of the periphery strategy evidenced an institutional bias: Israel's distrust for public diplomacy and its primary operator, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the fifties, distrust among Israeli cabinet members for diplomacy was a common feature. As the Director-General of the Ministry of Defense, Shimon Peres openly declared once that "the conduct of foreign policy cannot be left to the foreign office alone."[4] In the fifties, Peres implemented this approach by building a competing diplomatic body within the Ministry of Defense that would be responsible for military exchanges, arms sales with Israel's allies, and partners.

Because of the reliance on clandestinity, ties between Israel and its periphery became a field controlled by the intelligence services, in particular the Central Institute for Coordination, commonly known as the Mossad. It is worth noting that at the beginning, in 1949, although the Mossad belonged administratively to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, its head answered directly to the prime minister, a legacy from Ben-Gurion who had appointed his close adviser Reuven Shiloah and wanted to ensure his control over covert activities.[5] The predilection of prime ministers for the Mossad would endure. As Ariel Levite wrote, "the unique features of intelligence and security organizations – secrecy, centralization, operational flexibility, and direct control by national policymakers – make them highly attractive to policymakers everywhere for the pursuit and implementation of diverse national-security objective."[6]

Reports from the Israeli diplomatic archives on the making of the "periphery" are revealing on this secondary role played by diplomats during that period. In one volume, it is written:

Naturally, in addition to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, other government bodies were involved in these matters and thus the documentation in this chapter does not encompass the full range of activity that took place during the period under review.[7]

This understatement emphasizes how much the national diplomatic apparatus was sidelined.

But designing one ambitious foreign policy and to keep it away from the diplomatic apparatus had major consequences in the bureaucratic battles. Specifically, it reinforced the militarization of the national foreign policy. Many academic studies have already pointed out the major role played by armed forces in Israeli foreign policymaking, with, in some cases, the assertion that Israel's society was by nature militaristic.[8] This view grew in earnest with the works of the "new historians" in the 1980s (in particular Benny Morris, Avi Shlaim, and Tom Segev). The main argument goes, the history of Israel's state-building is so interrelated with the occurrence of wars that the military became a constitutive actor of the State and its society, not only at the institutional level but also the social, cultural, and economic levels.

This interaction between the civilian leadership and the military in Israel is more complicated. Ben-Gurion, who first held the two positions of Prime Minister and Defense Minister, stated clearly: "It is not up to the military to decide on the state's policy, regime, laws and governmental arrangements. […] The military is not more than an executive branch, the Defense and Security branch of Israel's government."[9] In the nineties, Ehud Barak, by then General and Chief of the General Staff, reiterated Ben-Gurion's message when he publicly declared that:

> the IDF does not determine policies […] Our responsibility is to carry out the government's instructions in the best possible way, to execute what has been agreed upon, and not to reach a situation whereby we try – knowingly or otherwise – to dictate to the government the nature of the political arrangement.[10]

Still, the imbalance between the ministry of defense and the ministry of foreign affairs was the consequence of the immediate challenges facing Israel in 1948, and it engendered an obvious bias in the policymaking. As Yehoshafat Harkabi, a former chief of military intelligence turned into a professor of international relations at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, wrote:

> Diplomatic success has to be judged by many criteria, particularly because military action has immediate results, while diplomatic action is more gradual and finally depends on long-term results. […] Military thinking tends to view confrontation as a zero-sum game – one side's loss is the other's gain, and all this in a narrow framework of us and our enemies – while diplomatic thinking starts with a zero-sum game which finally ends in

collaboration between the two sides, and has to take into account not only the enemy but also the reaction of third parties.[11]

The direct and obvious consequence of the prevailing role of the military and the intelligence services was the marginalization of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the making of Israel's foreign policy. It enabled the development of what Gabriel Sheffer and Oren Barak called Israel's "security network," which gathers IDF current and formers members as well as security personnel operating within various civilian spheres (the government, industry, Medias, universities).[12] Tracing back the origins of the militarization of Israel's politics, Sheffer and Barak explain that:

> in the decades after the establishment of the state, the boundaries between its civilian and security spheres have remained, by and large, extremely porous and almost non-existent, and this important factor has enabled the IDF, as well as Israel's informal security network, to wield considerable influence on all areas of public and private life.[13]

As a result, diplomats interviewed for this research expressed mixed views on the periphery strategy. Some merely dismissed it as being pure folklore, but others challenged its rationale: "it was doomed to fail because it was implemented by organizations that do not have the proper diplomatic know-how."[14] On the other side, a retired high-level official from the Ministry of Defense argued, while detailing his experience with the Turkey file in the nineties:

> our partnership with Turkey was handled by the Directorate of Policy of the Ministry of Defense, it was our team that engaged directly with the Turks and we did not involve the Ministry of Foreign Affairs because they were incapable of understanding the value of this partnership.[15]

Indeed the idea that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was not a credible organization – in terms of efficiency and political clout – is frequently evoked by former practitioners. These assertions should not be considered at face value, but they reveal a typical defiant attitude from defense agents toward diplomats. But moreover, the example of Turkish–Israeli relations puts into question the autonomous agenda of competing institutions in the field of foreign policy: all along the partnership, the militaries of both countries experienced positive cooperation, while the diplomatic relations remained more distant. This gap suggests the absence of a coordinated strategy.

Declassified archives show that this imbalance did not render the Ministry of Foreign Affairs entirely irrelevant. As diplomatic cables and memoirs of the fifties tell us, Israeli embassies and their personnel did play an instrumental role in the process of rapprochement. Although Reuven Shiloah led the delegations that dealt with Turks, Iranians and Ethiopians at the working level, there was a simultaneous effort being made at the political level by the Foreign Minister,

Golda Meir, and high-profile diplomats such as Abba Eban.[16] Nevertheless, the persistent primacy of the Mossad and the armed forces indicated Ben-Gurion's preferences and, in the long term, it had an impact on the content of the strategy. The leading institutions built a policy process that would put aside all fields that were not closely under their control. The result was that the periphery alliance became a clandestine operation mainly, if not exclusively, dealing with intelligence and military matters.

A clandestine policy process

Defining clandestine diplomacy is not an easy endeavor, and it has been noted by previous scholarship that diplomacy itself is surrounded by a cloud of secrecy and caution that does not qualify it as a purely public activity.[17] Historian Len Scott notes that "although clandestine diplomacy is a neglected area of enquiry, there are a number of examples where intelligence services are used to engage in secret and deniable discussions with adversaries." Later, Scott stresses a central issue:

> One question is whether clandestine diplomacy can be conceived as a form of covert action intended to influence an adversary or whether it is distinct from covert action because it involves conscious co-operation with the adversary and potential disclosure of the officers involved.[18]

The clandestine character of the periphery doctrine was the combined result of the Cold War environment and Shiloah's personal experience with clandestinity. This level of secrecy surrounding the periphery activities was so high that passages of Ben-Gurion's diaries on these matters were censored by the authorities until their release to the public in 2012.[19]

Clandestine diplomacy obviously opposes public diplomacy which is referred to in Hebrew by the word *hasbara* (the act of explaining). Public diplomacy has traditionally been the object of contempt by Israeli leaders. Ben-Gurion stated that "it doesn't matter what the Gentiles say, what matters is what the Jews do," while Shimon Peres argued "good policy doesn't need *hasbara*, and bad policy cannot be helped by the best *hasbara* in the world."[20] This attitude added to the contempt for the role of the ministry of foreign affairs in diplomatic affairs. One Israeli diplomat based in Paris told us,

> The real problem with such a strategy is its clandestine dimension because at the end of the day, if you don't reach the step where countries have public relations, you remain isolated in the eyes of your public opinion and in the eyes of the world in general. So politically speaking, the added value on the long term is limited.[21]

From the outset, this argument generated a key issue with the philosophy of the doctrine. It was understood by the Israeli national security team in the fifties, that clandestine relations were necessary to avoid rapid escalation with Arab

neighbors that would fear being encircled. But it has never been clear if secrecy was to be only the first phase or the norm. It appears that decision-makers may have wished it to be the first phase but that de facto it became the norm. This sometimes explains the negative assessment that former intelligence or military officers give, in retrospect, of the periphery. Critics complain about the lack of commitment from the Turkish, Ethiopian, or Iranian sides and their consistent avoidance to fully normalize their relations with Israel. This sheds light on the contradiction between institutional preferences – intelligence and military agencies – and the expected end state – the normalization of Israel's relations. This stresses the shortcomings of clandestine relations as they do not automatically pave the way to open diplomatic exchanges. This is what Noa Schonmann describes as the "mistress syndrome"[22] in Israel's clandestine relations: they had a significant value for countries such as Iran or Turkey, which benefited from Israeli technologies and intelligence assessments on the Arabs but they did not entice them to go further at the public level.

Secrecy also meant that the items on the agenda of the partnerships were almost exclusively defense and security matters. There was a significant interest, in particular from Ethiopia, to benefit from exchanges with Israel's agricultural industry and some in Israel expected trade and tourism to take off later on but these projects remained limited.

Because the Mossad was the leading agency, intelligence exchanges were obviously the most developed field of cooperation. By the late fifties, as tensions with Nasser's Egypt grew, the need to discuss assessments on the Arab military balance was seen as the top priority by Israel and its new peripheral allies. Soon, in Ethiopia, Addis Ababa became the forward operating base for Israeli covert actions on the African continent.[23] Intelligence cooperation even led to the building in 1958 of a semi-formal forum, the Trident triangular pact, which gathered the Mossad, the Turkish National Security Service and the Iranian Savak. Trident was in fact the only initiative that went beyond the bilateral level to include two of Israel's allies. The three partners met for the first time in September 1958 in Turkey and discussed their common priorities: Nasser's regional scheme, and Soviet influence in the Middle East. According to some observers, they even divided the region into zones of responsibility: Iran would cover intelligence from the Persian Gulf, Iraq, and Morocco. Yossi Alpher describes Trident as a major achievement of Ben-Gurion's regional strategy, calling it the "vanguard of the periphery doctrine," which enabled close exchanges on a near daily basis between intelligence organizations.[24]

Although Trident was by far the most advanced project, the Israeli intelligence agency never really felt they were gaining more valuable information than that they were sharing. This relates to the contradiction in the clandestine setting: Trident was clearly an enterprise to engage with the Iranians and the Turks, its outputs were expected at the political level rather than in the intelligence field. But at the same time, the very existence of Trident was known only by a few officials in Ankara and Tehran. It is, for instance, estimated that no more than 20 Turks were aware of it.[25]

In addition to Trident, the clandestine process included defense activities conducted by representatives from the armed forces. The military dimension of Israel's diplomacy was also emphasized by the growing reliance on arms sales as a vehicle of cooperation with the three peripheral States. This reflects an approach that more broadly has been salient in all Israeli governments, Labor or Likud, without distinction based on ideological orientation, when it came to arms business. In an important study about Israel's arms trade policy in 1985, Aaron Klieman from Tel Aviv University explained that "arms transfers are employed as a dual political-security instrument, essential to Israel's defense posture but also an indispensable component of foreign policy." Klieman suggested looking at Israeli arms export diplomacy "as an extension of the country's overall approach to external affairs." He added that "in fact, defenders of this present course maintain that given forced diplomatic isolation the sale of arms and technology is one of the few effective techniques remaining to further Israeli goals overseas."[26]

This view prevailed in the context of the periphery strategy as well, with all three partners becoming major clients of Israel's defense industry. Before the fall of the Shah in 1979, Iran went as far as to become the biggest buyer of Israeli arms.[27] Noticeably this did not completely vanish after the Islamic Revolution: as I describe in Chapter 4, Israelis played a significant role in the so-called "Irangate" and tried, till the bitter end, to engage with Khomeini's regime.

Turkey and Ethiopia also benefited from Israel's advanced military technologies. These contracts were usually part of a package that also included military training conducted by IDF representatives. Like in the case of Trident, the process was asymmetrical as the peripheral allies were consumers of Israeli military know-how. It was assumed that the dividends for Israel were to be found in the diplomatic field rather than in a security one. But this did not materialize as the consumers maintained their pragmatic caution regarding the normalization issue. Additionally, the role played by the Mossad and the IDF in that clandestine process engendered a significant issue, which was their politicization.[28] Because of its leading role, the intelligence community became a direct player of the political process instead of supporting it. As a result, it imported its ethos and its mindset into the decision-making environment.

The zero-sum game mindset

Eventually, the agencies involved in the implementation of the periphery came to build a cognitive framework that both supported and, in the long term, justified it. The periphery strategy did fuel a zero-sum game mindset. The Israeli doctrine was borne out of a realist philosophy that placed an emphasis on countering emerging threats by balancing them with a competing alliance. This logic derives from the general mindset of the Realist school of thought. Each actor of the system is seeking to maximize its power while minimizing its vulnerabilities. But such a system is built upon the principles of a zero-sum game: what one actor wins, the other loses. If A wins 5, B loses 5' therefore the sum is zero. In

the case of a triangular setting, this means that if C aligns itself with A against B, both A and C win 5 but B loses 10. It implies that C chooses one side over the other and takes the risk of antagonizing B. In other words, this zero-sum game mindset is the "either with us or with them" logic.[29]

Clearly acknowledged by Israeli policymakers, this logic of the zero-sum game reinforces the logic of balancing or countering the Arab world as the primary objective of Israel's foreign policy. It institutionalizes the principle that peace and normalization with Arab neighboring countries is impossible. But at the same time, it gives a perennial dimension to a strategy that was conceived only as a temporary remedy to Israel's isolation. This is one of the most profound contradictions in Israel's grand strategy: the extension of a short-term solution into a permanent posture. As a matter of fact, this can be traced back to Jabotinsky's concept of an iron wall and its interpretation back then.

In his analysis of Jabotinsky's legacy, Avi Shlaim underlined how, too often, his manifesto, "The Iron Wall," was misunderstood and misused, even by his own followers. Shlaim points out that for Jabotinsky, "the iron wall was not an end in itself but a means to the end of breaking Arab resistance to the onward march of Zionism." The rationale was that after the defeat of the Arab resistance, "a process of change would occur inside the Palestinian national movement, with the moderates coming to the fore. Then and only then would it be time to start serious negotiations."[30]

The logic of a zero-sum game is a common approach among military officers and intelligence operatives. As these actors plan their work according to an identified threat, they build a process where addressing hostility is the main driver of their efforts. It therefore confers lower value to cooperation which is perceived only as a possible response to counter a threat. In contrast, diplomats tend to look at cooperation and its process as the primary objective. Diplomacy is meant to prevent hostility by sustaining a cooperative environment. Such beliefs obviously did not fit into the periphery matrix.

This is the reason why, from the outset, the logic of the periphery alliance engendered skepticism, usually and not surprisingly coming from professional diplomats. The first argument against the zero-sum game mindset was that the periphery doctrine only exacerbated the hostilities with the Arab world, by giving texture to their accusations of Israel's clandestine activities. In an interview with Yossi Alpher, Shimon Shamir, a professor at Tel Aviv University and former Israeli Ambassador to Cairo and Amman, deplored the endurance of the periphery, explaining that this "linking up with non-Arab actors in the Middle East just exacerbated the [Arab] hatred."[31]

The partnership with Ethiopia, Turkey, and, in particular, Iran created a vicious circle with Arab rulers who pointed at Israeli clandestine activities as proof of subversion and strategy to divide and rule the Arab world through its minorities. It logically fueled Middle Eastern conspiracy theories about Israel's hidden hand, and as a result, made the task harder for the political officials and the diplomats who were seeking accommodation – rather than confrontation – with Arab neighbors.[32]

The same can be said of the new periphery. Israel's rapprochement with Greece logically irritated Turkish leaders who, in return, escalated a bit more their anti-Israeli rhetoric. Likewise, Israel's discreet cooperation with Azerbaijan engendered much tension among the rulers in Tehran who believed the Israelis may use their northern neighbor to conduct intelligence operations or plan air-strikes on Iranian nuclear plants. In defense of the new periphery, its proponents tend to use the same fatalistic rhetoric as with Israel–Arab relations in the fifties, arguing that Turkey and Iran have now turned into archenemies of Israel, and that finding new allies is an essential mission.

The zero-sum logic also led the skeptics of the strategy to question the feasibility of a plan that mobilized potential allies, only on the principle that they had a common enemy. In reality, relations between Turkey, Iran, Ethiopia, and Arab countries were much more complex than full enmity. Although there were strong concerns over Egyptian hegemonic agenda, all three countries maintained diplomatic ties. The perceptions in the Arab world over Iran and Turkey balanced between fears of Ottoman and Persian imperialistic designs and the recognition of common values through their shared belief in Islam.

In this sense, while the Israelis saw the periphery alliance as a means to counter the Arab world, its partners seemed only to hedge against it. This ambiguity was clearly understood by some members of the Israeli government. Early on, in a telegram to Ben-Gurion on May 13, 1958, Ambassador Eban expressed:

> doubts as to whether such a plan is practicable. It is based on the assumption that these three states are mature enough to pass from extreme support of the Arabs to a situation of completely ignoring the Arab issue. In other words is their animosity to Nasser sufficient to be the base for the creation of an alliance directed against him that would include Israel, since over and above animosity to Egypt, they have numerous interests in the Arab world that would cause them to distance themselves from Israel?[33]

Eban was anticipating what would become the major obstacle to the periphery alliance, the very fact that its members would try to both exploit defense cooperation with Israel while maintaining good diplomatic relations with the Arab countries. The conclusion from Eban was to avoid committing Israel to a regional alliance and to pursue separately the bilateral tracks with the three countries, Iran, Ethiopia, and Turkey.

Partly because of these issues, the periphery alliance designed in the fifties never reached the level expected by its founders. Its regional framework was loosely set up, with only trilateral intelligence exchanges conducted between the Israelis, the Turks, and the Iranians. Moreover, the continued ambiguity over the commitment from the members of the alliance – namely the normalization of relations with Israel – prevented the initiative from developing further. It remained in place until changes in the political system of the partners jeopardized the engagement with Israel: the demise of Haile Selassie in Ethiopia, the rise of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, or much later, the accession to power by the AKP in Turkey.

One may find it remarkable, that with such modest results, the periphery doctrine did come back in recent years. As we see later in this book, this was mainly due to the fact that the content of the periphery matrix had not disappeared despite the collapse of the policy itself. The military and intelligence services continued to play a decisive role in foreign-policymaking, secrecy remained a core feature of Israeli diplomatic initiatives and finally the logic of the zero-sum game was still the approach through which policymakers articulated their goals.

Notes

 1 Colin Gray, *Modern Strategy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 33.
 2 For Margaret Levi, path dependence means that "once a country or region has started down a track, the costs of reversal are very high. There will be other choice points, but the entrenchments of certain institutional arrangements obstruct an easy reversal of the initial choice" in: Margaret Levi, "A Model, a Method, and a Map: Rational Choice in Comparative and Historical Analysis" in: Mark Irving Lichbach and Alan Zuckerman (Eds.), *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997, p. 28. See also Ian Greener, "The Potential of Path Dependence in Political Studies," *Politics*, Vol. 25, No. 1, February 2005, pp. 62–72; Paul Pierson, "Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 94, No. 2, 2000, pp. 251–267; Jacob Torfing, "Rethinking Path Dependence in Public Policy Research," *Critical Political Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2009, pp. 70–83.
 3 Yossi Alpher, *Periphery: Israel's Search for Middle East Allies*, New York, Rowman & Littlefield, 2015, p. 87.
 4 Sasha Polakow-Suransky, *The Unspoken Alliance: Israel's Secret Relationship with Apartheid South Africa*, New York, Vintage, p. 24. See also Gabriel Sheffer and Oren Barak, *Israel's Security Networks: A Theoretical and Comparative Perspective*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 102–103.
 5 Amos Gilboa and Ephraim Lapid (Eds.), *Israel's Silent Defender: An Inside Look at Sixty Years of Israeli Intelligence*, Jerusalem, Geffen Publishing House, 2011, p. 4.
 6 Ariel Levite, "The Role of Intelligence in Israel's Foreign Policy," *Defense Analysis*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1987, pp. 177–179, p. 177.
 7 State of Israel, Israel State Archives, Documents on the Foreign Policy of Israel, Vol. 13, 1958–1959, Jerusalem, 2001, p. XIV.
 8 See Edna Lomsky-Feder and Eyal Ben-Ari (Eds.), *The Military and Militarism in Israeli Society*, Albany, SUNY Press, 2000; Gabriel Sheffer and Oren Barak (Eds.), *Militarism and Israeli Society*, Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2010; Uri Ben-Eliezer, "A Nation-in-Arms: State, Nation, and Militarism in Israel's First Years," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 37, No. 2, April 1995, pp. 264–285; Baruch Kimmerling, "Patterns of Militarism in Israel," *European Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 34, No. 2, November 1993, pp. 196–223.
 9 Yoram Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room: How the Military Shapes Israeli Policy*, Washington, United States Institute of Peace Press, 2006, p. 24.
10 Ibid., p. 25.
11 Yehoshafat Harkabi, *War and Strategy* [in Hebrew], Tel Aviv, Ministry of Defense, 1990, p. 512. Quoted in: Yoram Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room*, op. cit., p. 218.
12 Gabriel Sheffer and Oren Barak, *Israel's Security Networks*, op. cit. Both authors describe Israel's security network as "informal policy network in which one of its members' most significant concerns is security […] that has had a significant impact on domestic and external policymaking and concrete strategic and tactical policies in recent decades" (p. 2).

13 Gabriel Sheffer and Oren Barak, *Israel's Security Networks*, op. cit., p. 5.

14 Interview with the author, Jerusalem, February 2015.

15 Interview with the author, Tel Aviv, February 2015.

16 Abba Eban, *Personal Witness: Israel through my Eyes*, London, Jonathan Cape Press, 1992.

17 See Clive Jones, "Introduction, Themes and Issues" in: Clive Jones and Tore Petersen (Eds.), *Israel's Clandestine Diplomacies*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 3–4.

18 Len Scott, "Secret Intelligence, Covert Action and Clandestine Diplomacy" in: Len Scott and Peter Jackson (Eds.), *Understanding Intelligence in the Twenty-First Century: Journeys in the Shadows*, London, Routledge, 2004, p. 169.

19 Yossi Alpher, *Periphery*, op. cit., p. 87.

20 Quoted in: Eytan Gilboa, "Public Diplomacy: The Missing Component in Israel's Foreign Policy" in: Efraim Inbar (Ed.), *Israel's Strategic Agenda*, London, Routledge, 2007, p. 122.

21 Interview with the author, Rome, March 2013.

22 Noa Schonmann, "Back-Door Diplomacy: The Mistress Syndrome in Israel's Relations with Turkey, 1957–60," in: Clive Jones and Tore Petersen (Eds.), *Israel's Clandestine Diplomacies*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 85.

23 Michael Bishku, "Israel and Ethiopia: From a Special to a Pragmatic Relationship," *Conflict Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 2, Spring 1994, pp. 39–62, p. 46.

24 Yossi Alpher, *Periphery*, op. cit., pp. 12–14.

25 See Ofra Bengio, *The Turkish–Israeli Relationship: Changing Ties of Middle East Outsiders*, New York, Palgrave, 2010.

26 Aaron Klieman, *Israel's Global Reach: Arms Sales as Diplomacy*, New York, Pergamon Brassey's, 1985, p. 34.

27 Jane Hunter, "Israeli Arms Sales to Iran," *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, November 1986, p. 2.

28 Glenn Hastedt, "The Politics of Intelligence and the Politicization of Intelligence: the American Experience," *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 28, No. 1, February 2013, pp. 5–31.

29 On game theory and international relations, see Jon Hovi, *Games, Threats and Treaties: Understanding Commitments in International Relations*, Pinter, Herndon, 1998; Randall W. Stone, "The Use and Abuse of Game Theory in International Relations," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 45, No. 2, April 2001, pp. 216–244; Michael Nicholson, *Formal Theories in International Relations*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1989.

30 Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, New York, Norton, 2001, p. 15.

31 Interview quoted in: Yossi Alpher, *Periphery*, op. cit., pp. 88–89.

32 See Matthew Gray, *Conspiracy Theories in the Arab World: Sources and Politics*, New York, Routledge, 2010.

33 "A. Eban (Washington) to D. Ben-Gurion," May 13, 1958. Copy: 130.02/2450/9. State of Israel, Israel State Archives, Documents on the Foreign Policy of Israel, Vol. 13, 1958–1959, Jerusalem, 2001, p. 384.

Part II

Deconstructing the periphery doctrine

After analyzing the overarching logic of the periphery doctrine in the first two chapters, this second part of the book aims to get into the details of its implementation. Indeed, to better assess the strategy, we need to look at the concrete policies initiated by the Israeli government. We start our investigation in the years 1957 and 1958, a turning point in Israel's regional policy, as its leadership comes to the realization that partnerships with Turkey, Iran, and Ethiopia could counter Nasser's regional ambitions and moreover would support US interests in the Middle East in the context of the global competition with the USSR.

Starting in 1950–1951, Israeli officials visited the US to make the case for an American–Israeli rapprochement in the military field. In 1954, a document from the US National Security Council emphasized how US vital interests would be "critically endangered" if the Middle East passed under Soviet control.[1] Nevertheless, the Israeli attempt was not yet successful. First, back in the fifties, the US was perceived as a distant superpower, whose interest and expertise in Middle Eastern affairs was limited. In his memoirs, Abba Eban recalls:

> the days when Charles Wilson, who was McNamara's predecessor both as president of General Motors and as secretary of defense had asked me and my military attaché, Chaim Herzog, whether "Turkey is one of the Arab countries that are not on good terms with you."[2]

This reflects US reluctance in the first half of the fifties to play an active role in the region. Second, Israeli policymakers feared a formal agreement with Washington would put its policy of non-identification at risk.[3] Consequently, Ben-Gurion's objective was to obtain arms supplies from the US but to put aside the discussion of a formal defense treaty.[4]

In those days, the closest Western ally to Israel was not yet the US, but France, whose governments of the Fourth Republic supplied the Israelis with arms and even went as far to cooperate in the nuclear field.[5] However, the Suez crisis in late 1956, where Israel coordinated the attack on Egypt with the United Kingdom and France completely changed the relations between the Jewish State and Western powers. It strained relations with the United States and stirred internal controversy in France.

By May 1958 the political crisis in Paris – triggered by the protracted war in Algeria – had led to the collapse of the Fourth Republic and brought General Charles de Gaulle back to the center of French politics. De Gaulle aimed to rebalance Paris's policy vis-à-vis the Israel–Arab conflict with his so-called "*politique arabe de la France*."

Until 1967 France would remain the first arms supplier of Israel.[6] But Israeli policymakers perceived France less and less as a possible long-term, viable alternative to the US.[7] After the Suez crisis – which marked the decline of both the United Kingdom and France – Washington was perceived as the last dominant Western power in the Middle East.[8] Meanwhile, the 1956 war had strengthened Nasser's position within the Arab world and accelerated his regional ascendancy. In Washington, Eisenhower and his Secretary of State felt that "Nasserism" would pave the way for communist influence in the Middle East while the British–French failure in Suez had created a power vacuum.[9]

Faced with uncertainties concerning the future of Israel–France relations, Ben-Gurion considered he had to enhance ties with the US. However, the Israeli Prime Minister was not enthusiastic about it, as he feared the US would treat the newly established and tiny State as a mere satellite in the Middle East.[10] However, at the same time, he quickly saw how the periphery alliance could be valuable for US interests in the Middle East and that it would eventually make Israel a strategic asset for Washington in the region. By the mid-fifties, the USSR had invested significant efforts in the support to the countries of the so-called "third world." Nationalist movements in Africa, Asia and the Middle East were emerging with a strong anti-Western rhetoric. Nevertheless, until 1955, the Soviet activity in the Middle East was modest in the military field. That same year, the US had played an instrumental role in the building of the Baghdad Pact, later renamed the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). Formed by Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey and the UK, the Pact was explicitly designed as a NATO for the Middle East.

From the outset, the project was condemned by Arab leaders such as King Saud and Egyptian President, Gamal Abdul Nasser. As a result, Moscow strengthened its ties with the latter by selling arms to the Egyptians and by providing them with military training. The Soviets started supporting the Arab regimes in the conflict with Israel. But, it was only after the creation of the Baghdad Pact that Khrushchev approved the arms sales to Egypt, even though Nasser had already tried in the past to acquire Soviet weapons. Despite the increased Soviet backing of Arab militaries, Moscow was not endorsing the full stance of their leaders. The USSR had recognized Israel and was not calling for its destruction. Rather, it was hostile to Israel's Western orientation and its perceived role in the spread of American imperialism.

Still, Ben-Gurion and his cabinet conveyed the message to their American counterparts that Nasserism was ideologically and militarily associated with the USSR, that the totalitarian nature of both regimes made them natural allies and that, in response, the US should support any initiative to counter this rapprochement. This is how only a few days after the Iraqi crisis, Ben-Gurion wrote to US President Eisenhower to detail this new grand strategy:

With the purpose of erecting a high dam against the Nasserist-Soviet tidal wave, we have begun tightening our links with several states on the outside of the perimeter of the Middle East – Iran, Turkey and Ethiopia.… Our goal is to organize a group of countries, not necessarily an official alliance, that will be able to stand strong against Soviet expansion by proxy through Nasser, and which might save Lebanon's freedom, and maybe in time, Syria's.[11]

In some ways, Ben-Gurion's letter was the original manifesto of the periphery alliance. Only days after the fall of Baghdad, it evidenced the strategic significance of the Iraqi coup for Israel and the need for its policymakers to coordinate the appropriate response with the US government. As a result, on the first of August, President Eisenhower tasked his Secretary of State John Foster Dulles to send a message to Ben-Gurion stating that the US supported the Israeli initiative. At the same time, Washington encouraged leaders in Iran, Turkey, and Ethiopia to join Ben-Gurion's project. A letter from Eban to Ben-Gurion in September 1958 evidenced Israel's knowledge of American support:

Regarding the question as to whether "our friends in the United States would keep their word," it seems […] that the situation is quite encouraging […] I have been informed by the Turks that Dulles has spoken to them on two occasions. I also know that the U.S. ambassador in Teheran has, on instructions from Dulles, spoken to the Shah and received an enthusiastic reaction. I also know that the US Ambassador in Addis Abeba has been instructed to speak to the Emperor in support of contacts with Israel.[12]

However these facts should not dismiss the complex Israeli–American relation at that time. It had been only two years since Israel, alongside France and the United Kingdom, had launched the Suez War that caused US condemnations.[13] Moreover, the White House was becoming preoccupied by Israel's nuclear ambitions as France helped the building of a nuclear plant in Dimona.[14]

Against that backdrop, this second part of our book evaluates each partnership on a case by case basis. The case-by-case basis was chosen mainly because a regional assessment could have been misleading. As written earlier, Israel eventually failed to build a robust regional alliance and settled for several bilateral tracks. Therefore, looking at the developments between Israel and its partners at the regional level would confer a dimension to these relations that they never really had.

We start in Chapter 3 with the building of Israel–Turkey relations, followed then in Chapter 4, by an analysis of Israel–Iran relations. Finally, Chapter 5 documents the other cases that proved less important to Israeli leadership such as the development of Israel–Ethiopia relations or Israel's engagement with Arab minorities like the Kurds and the Christian Arabs in Lebanon. These initiatives were compiled into one chapter, because they did not constitute pillars of the doctrine the same way Turkey and Iran did. Indeed, when the overarching

approach of the doctrine was jeopardized, this was neither due to the demise of Israel–Ethiopia ties following the fall of Haile Selassie in 1974 nor due to the failed engagement of Israel with neighboring Arab minorities. The doctrine was eventually put into question when the Iranian regime of the Shah was replaced in 1979 by the revolutionary forces led by Ayatollah Khomeini.

Looking at the details of each of these cases allows us to tackle issues and questions that have been at the core of the periphery concept. First, it evidences the extensive and primary role of the military and the intelligence services in the making of the bilateral relations, at the cost of the diplomats. Second, it reveals the importance of the historical and mythological narratives (on the Jews, the Turks, and the Persians) used by the national leaders to make the case for modern partnerships. Third, it shows how much the Arab factor constrained the development of the relations. The ambiguity maintained vis-à-vis Israel in the international arena, in particular by both Turkish and Iranian leadership, translated their uneasiness to publicly demonstrate these diplomatic relations. Fourth, it evidences how the US government played an instrumental role to shore up the alliance by conveying their support to the Israeli initiative and by encouraging the Turkish and Iranian rulers to go ahead.

One of the advantages of retrospective analysis like the one I offer in this second part is that it enables us to acutely identify the fundamental flaws of the periphery doctrine by looking at its evolution in front of political changes. International crises generally crystallize deep tensions and inescapable contradictions in a given system. The collapse of Israel–Iran relations and then Israel–Turkey relations reflected the limitations of these partnerships which had been known to the stakeholders from the beginning. Though, we should not look at political crises such as the Iranian revolution of 1979 or the Israeli–Turkish clash of 2010 only to enumerate causes and consequences, but rather to identify the underlying logic of the system.[15] Through this unravelling, the crisis revealed the inner dynamics of the partnerships and the motivations behind its leading actors.

Notes

1 Jonathan House, *A Military History of the Cold War: 1944–1962*, Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 2012, p. 337.
2 Abba Eban, *Personal Witness: Israel Through My Eyes*, New York, Putnam, 1992, p. 340.
3 Uri Bialer, *Between East and West: Israel's Foreign Policy Orientation 1948–1956*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 245–246.
4 Zach Levey, *Israel and the Western Powers, 1952–1960*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1997, p. 81.
5 Ibid., p. 55; Avner Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1999.
6 Anita Shapira, *Israel: A History*, Waltham, Brandeis University Press, 2014, p. 284.
7 Zach Levey, *Israel and the Western Powers*, op. cit., p. 117.
8 Roger Louis and Roger Owen, *Suez 1956: The Crisis and its Consequences*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 3.
9 Jonathan House, *A Military History of the Cold War*, op. cit., p. 352.

10 Anita Shapira, *Ben-Gurion: Father of Modern Israel*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2014, p. 205.
11 Quoted in: Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the US*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2008, pp. 22–23.
12 "A. Eban [Washington] to D. Ben-Gurion." September 1958. Copy: 130.02/2450/9. State of Israel, Israel State Archives, Documents on the Foreign Policy of Israel, Vol. 13, 1958–1959, Jerusalem, 2001, p. 400.
13 On the Israeli–American relations after the Suez War, see Orna Almog, *Britain, Israel and the United States, 1955–1958: Beyond Suez*, London, Frank Cass, 2003.
14 Avner Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, op. cit.
15 This approach is influenced by the academic works of French social scientists and philosophers such as Michel Dobry, *Sociologie des crises politiques*, Paris, Presses de la F.N.S.P., 1992 and Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines*, Paris, Gallimard, 1966.

3 The enduring ambiguities of Turkey–Israel relations

The contemporary crisis in Turkey–Israel relations starting in the late 2000s has been the object of numerous comments. But all too often, observers in the media failed to put these tensions into historical perspectives. In fact, if one looks at the history of this bilateral relation since the birth of Israel, the contemporary crisis appears then as a new episode in a long series of disputes that constitute the complex relation between the two countries. This chapter offers a history of seven decades of Israel–Turkey relations. It is by no means a comprehensive and full account of the bilateral relation but it does emphasize the key factors to understand its development: the supporting role of the US government to enhance the ties between two of its close allies in the Middle East; the importance of the Turkish military as a supporter of cooperation with Israel in the Turkish domestic power plays; the Turkish–Arab relations as the recurrent adjustment variable of the Turkish–Israeli partnership.

Turkey and the establishment of Israel

Israeli historians tend to be sensitive to the fact that, contrary to European powers, the Ottoman Empire did not persecute Jews. "No Jewish blood had ever been spilled there by Turks and the Turks harbored no traditional enmity towards the Jews" writes Amikam Nachmani.[1] In the thirties, the leadership of the Jewish Agency and Turkey maintained good relations. Chaim Weizmann travelled to Ankara in 1938 and Turkish ministers expressed positive reactions toward the Zionist project.[2]

However, the Turkish government of Hasan Saka voted against the resolution 1981 that detailed a partition plan of Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state and which was voted at the US General Assembly on November 29, 1947. The causes for Turkish opposition were twofold: the first and most obvious one was Ankara's desire not to break ties with the Arab and the Muslim world; the second was the assumption that Zionism shared similarities with communism and that it would, consequently, serve USSR objectives in the region.[3] The latter would prove wrongly founded, but the former would influence Turkish policy for decades.

By March 1949, the mindset in Ankara had slightly evolved, and Turkey became the first Muslim country to recognize de facto Israel. In March of the

following year, diplomatic relations were established at the level of legation with a Minister Plenipotentiary appointed to Tel Aviv and an Israeli legation similarly established in Ankara. This step logically triggered public condemnations of Turkey by Arab countries invoking the shattered Islamic solidarity against the Zionist project.[4] But at that moment, the Turkish government of Adnan Menderes, elected in 1950, had different priorities. It aimed not to strengthen Turkish–Arab relations, but to integrate the country into the Western sphere. This succeeded on February 18, 1952 with Turkey becoming a member of the recently established North Atlantic Treaty Organization (along Greece, which joined the same day).

As a result, Turkish officials showed signs of overture toward Israel. In June 1954, Prime Minister Adnan Menderes even declared "it was time [the Arabs] recognized Israel's right to survive." The response from Nasser was straightforward: in a speech delivered two months later, the Egyptian leader argued that "Turkey, because of its Israeli policy, is disliked in the Arab world."[5] This heralded the delicate position of Turkey between the Arab world and Israel.

To evidence the new ties with Ankara, the government in Jerusalem soon aligned itself with the Turkish policy on Cyprus. This marked the beginning of a strategic triangle in the area: over the coming years the governments of the two countries internalized the security priorities of the other one, and a zero-sum game between the players became the primary rule. Because Israel was moving closer to Turkey, its relation with Greece would deteriorate accordingly.

The issue of Cyprus was to be the litmus test of that zero-sum game. When in June 1878 the Ottoman Empire had ceded the island of Cyprus to the United Kingdom to make it a protectorate, the local population was primarily orthodox and the Muslims were a minority. In 1925, Cyprus formally became a colony of the Commonwealth, and in the following years the orthodox community built a strong national identity under Greece's influence. Eventually, they started claiming the union (*enossis*) of Cyprus with Greece. But by the fifties, the strategic environment had dramatically changed. The Turkish government of Adnan Menderes saw the island as an extension of Anatolia and opposed the *enossis* movement. Soon a diplomatic crisis emerged as Ankara demanded the sustainment of the current status quo while the Greek government advocated for the union. While Greek Cypriots intensified their nationalist claims, Turkish Cypriots felt oppressed and both communities engaged in communitarian fighting.

Although Israel was initially supportive of diplomatic ties with Cyprus, it soon aligned itself with Ankara's position. Not only was the Turkish–Israeli relation a priority, but Cypriot separatists were receiving arms from the Egyptian ruler Nasser.[6] This Israeli position on Cyprus led to a softer posture of the Turkish delegation at the UN on the Israeli–Arab dispute.[7] As a result, it also deepened the level of distrust between Israel and Greece.

However, the Suez War of 1956 would lead to a halt in the steady rapprochement between Ankara and Jerusalem. On October 29 of that year, Israeli armed forces attacked the Egyptians and pushed toward the Suez Canal that had been nationalized three months before. The Israelis were joined two days later by the

British and French forces. However, this campaign was soon condemned by both the USSR and the US with threats of economic sanctions from Washington addressed to the three nations. The French and the British eventually withdrew their forces by December 1956, and the Israelis by March 1957.

The war had a direct impact on Israel–Turkey relations. The pressure from Arab partners was such that Ankara scaled down its diplomatic mission to Israel and recalled its minister, Sevket Istinyeli. On November 26, 1956, a month after Israel invaded Egypt, the Turkish government issued a statement that it "has decided to recall its Minister in Tel Aviv, who will not return until a just and final solution of the Palestine question has been achieved."[8] Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, who was by then at the peak of his popularity in the Arab world, was at the forefront of that call on Turkish government. This shift in Turkey's orientation would prove the relevance of one fundamental driver of its policy toward Israel: the Arab factor. Still, Turkey's position at the UN during the Suez crisis was one of restraint. It did vote in favor of proposals calling external forces to withdraw from Egypt but it abstained when it came to the vote over the creation of a UN Emergency Command Force that would monitor the cessation of hostilities.[9] Turkey's calculus was clear: to support the Arabs without going as far as to antagonize the Israelis.

The transformation of Turkey into a peripheral ally

It would take a year before Ankara resumed its relations with Jerusalem and that was largely the result of the Turkish calculus to hedge vis-à-vis the preoccupying developments in the Arab world: first, the increasing ties between neighboring Syria and the USSR, and second the 1958 coup in Iraq.

According to Israeli governmental archives, the bilateral ties with Turkey were resumed near the end of 1957. One man was instrumental in this move: Eliahu Sasson. Israeli Ambassador in Rome at that time, Sasson had been the envoy to Ankara between 1950 and 1953. Sasson met with Adnan Menderes, the Turkish Prime Minister, in Paris between December 16 and 19, 1957 on the sidelines of a NATO meeting of heads of government to discuss potential cooperation. After this first encounter, Sasson was instructed by Jerusalem to meet again Menderes in January 1958 ahead of a meeting of the foreign ministers of the Baghdad Pact. According to a diplomatic cable, "the purpose of the meeting is twofold: to improve relations between Israel and Turkey and to discuss Israel's attitude to the Baghdad Pact."[10] As a result, Sasson sent a letter to Menderes through the Turkish Ambassador in Rome to convey the intent of the Israeli government. The document sets out the core principles of the partnership:

> The Government of Israel advocates the strengthening of ties in order to reinforce the joint stand against the imminent danger to the Middle East arising out of the cold war. The two governments should develop joint proposals for cooperation and bring them to the knowledge of the United States

and Western countries. Exchange of information in the political and military arenas should be implemented so that in times of emergency forces can be drawn up to face any attempt to remove them from the free world.[11]

The content of the talks in the following meetings reflects how much the Israeli–Turkish rapprochement was driven by the developments in the Arab world. In early March, the Israeli chargé d'affaires in Ankara, Moshe Alon, and the Turkish Foreign Minister exchanged views on the evolution of the Baghdad Pact. Israeli sources indicate:

> Turkey is satisfied with the federation of kings, and supported it because it constitutes a counter force to Nasser. On the other hand, the establishment of the U.A.R. [the United Arab Republic[12]] constitutes a hazard, especially because of the presence of the Egyptian army, equipped and trained by the Soviets, on the borders of Turkey and Israel.[13]

Contacts increased in the following months. In particular, a meeting of experts was organized in Rome between June 26 and July 2. The Israeli delegation was headed by Reuven Shiloah, the architect of the periphery alliance, along with Eliahu Sasson. The Turkish delegation was led by Adnan Kural, a diplomat based in Ankara. But the major trigger for cooperation was an event in the Arab world: on July 14, 1958, the Hashemite monarchy in Iraq was overthrown by a military revolt.

Along Turkey and Pakistan, the Iraqi monarchy had been a member of the Baghdad Pact, which aimed at anchoring a Western-oriented alliance in the region. The military coup led by Abdul Salam Areef and Abd al Kareem Qaseem surprised the White House and the intelligence community, which believed afterward that the Egyptian ruler, Nasser, was behind the revolution.[14] It is worth reading the letter sent by Reuven Shiloah to the Israel Embassy in Rome to understand the level of anxiety raised by the Iraqi coup:

> Israel has requested immediate action by the United States in putting down the coup in Iraq, with the aid of Turkey and Iran, members of the Baghdad Pact. […] Israel warns that if they do not take immediate action, the entire Middle East will fall to Nasser and the Soviets.[15]

With this regime change occurring in Iraq at the same time as the United Arab Republic was established between Egypt and Syria, pan-Arabism had gained a momentum in the region that engendered fear among the non-Arab countries in the Middle East. Turks and Israelis both feared that Nasser's delusions of regional hegemony would drive his pan-Arabist agenda. In addition the US–USSR competition also played a significant role as both Turkey and Israel were eager to be part of the Western side.

The revolution in Baghdad eventually was the event that made the case for the "alliance of the periphery" to the Prime Minister Ben-Gurion. During this

crucial period, exchanges between Israeli diplomats in charge of relations with Iran and Turkey evidence the emerging rationale: that a periphery strategy would seek to counterbalance Arab foes by strengthening military ties with non-Arab countries in the Middle East. Along with the Shah's Iran and Haile Selassie's Ethiopia, Turkey was to become a new primary partner.

In August 1958, the Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs, Golda Meir, met her Turkish counterpart, Zorlu, in Zurich. Reporting on the meeting, Shiloah wrote to Jerusalem on August 11:

> From an objective viewpoint the two countries have common interests. Events in the region are developing rapidly and it is necessary to draw up a joint plan of action for the free states of the area with the assistance of the Western powers in order to stop Nasser.[16]

During the talks with Meir, Zorlu suggested the planning of a meeting between the prime ministers of the two countries. This new step was eventually reached on August 29, 1958 when Ben-Gurion visited Ankara to meet his counterpart Adnan Menderes. Full secrecy surrounded the preparation of the visit and the content of their talks remains till today the topic of controversies. Israeli diplomatic archives state that during the Ben-Gurion–Menderes meeting, "it was agreed that the anti-Nasserist forces in the Middle East should unite with the support of the Western powers led by the United States and that cooperation in the political, security, and economic spheres be strengthened."[17]

Apart from this rather vague statement, the details of the Ben-Gurion–Menderes meeting remained classified. Turkish officials downplay the importance of the event and describe the meeting as a mere recognition of mutual interests without a binding written statement. For instance, Çevik Bir, deputy chief of staff of the Turkish armed forces from 1995 to 1998, argued in a piece for the *Middle East Quarterly* that the Turkish–Israeli pact from 1958 contained nothing concrete. Bir downplayed the significance of the document, emphasizing the idea that the bilateral relation "were more symbolic than substantive" before the 1990s.[18]

However, Sezai Orkunt, head of Turkey's military intelligence from 1964 to 1968, declared that an agreement had been concluded but that its content was made known only to a dozen of civilian and military policymakers inside the Turkish government.[19] These contradictory views illustrate what soon became the rule of Israel–Turkey relations: ambiguity, extreme caution, and, if necessary, opposite statements to preserve the clandestine character of the cooperation. In 1959, the head of the Israeli legation in Turkey even qualified the relation with Ankara as "love outside marriage."[20] Likewise, scholar Noa Schonmann refers to this diplomatic style as a "mistress syndrome" on the side of Turkey.[21]

In 1960, the new regime of General Cemal Gürsel replaced Menderes but did not revoke the ties with Israel. These ties would become even stronger as it progressively appeared that in Ankara the most important supporters of the cooperation were the armed forces. Turkish generals saw the exchange with

Israeli intelligence as very valuable to monitor the developments in Syria, while the possibility to improve the readiness of its soldiers via training events with the IDF was perceived as beneficial. By 1959, according to Tel Aviv-based scholar Ofra Bengio, both Israeli and Turkish armies had worked together on "a joint strategic plan for a war against Syria (and possibly against another Arab country)."[22] Additionally, the Israeli Air Force (IAF) was given permission to train on Turkish territory. Given the narrowness of Israel's territory and its absence of strategic depth, this possibility was crucial to keep the IAF operational against a potential attack.

But soon, Gürsel realized that getting closer to Israel had a major prize. In Iran the Shah had announced in July 1960 his public recognition of Israel, a gesture that led to fierce reactions in the Arab world and dramatic consequences, such as the deterioration of Arab–Iranian relations. Looking at these developments, Gürsel was not keen on antagonizing the Arab rulers nor was his successor, Ismet İnönü. As a result, political exchanges remained discreet, if not secret, while economic cooperation – usually perceived as less sensitive – grew in earnest. While entrepreneurs in both countries were getting enthusiastic, Turkish politicians remained cautious and Israeli counterparts became frustrated.

The Cyprus file would evidence the limitations of Turkish–Israeli entente. By 1963, the issue of Cyprus had escalated with open confrontation between the Greek and Turkish communities. Witnessing the imbalance between the Greeks and the Turkish minority, Ankara decided to intervene by bombing Nicosia and threatened a full military intervention. The government of İnönü believed the Western powers, in particular the UK and the US, had abandoned the Turkish community of Cyprus and, as a consequence, Ankara sought new allies that could help with supporting its views at the UN general assembly.[23]

Eventually, this led Turkey to reconsider its priorities regarding the Arab–Israeli dispute: it needed the diplomatic leverage that Arab countries could provide on the Cyprus issue but to that aim, it had to accommodate Arab demands on distancing itself from Israel. Furthermore, Israel was also playing a delicate game during the 1964 Cypriot crisis that infuriated the Turkish officials. Jerusalem did not want to endorse Turkish bombardment and expressed concerns for the humanitarian disaster on the island.[24] The result was that the Turkish–Israeli momentum gained after 1958 came to a halt. Arab–Turkish relations were growing stronger in terms of trade, diplomatic visits, and media coverage.

While remaining militarily neutral during the 1967 war, Turkey opposed Israel's annexation of territories. Significantly, Turkey, which had not been vocal before on the Palestinian issue, suddenly expressed its concerns for the refugees.[25] In 1975, Turkey supported the UN General Assembly's Resolution 3379 – equating Zionism with racism. This same year, the Turkish government decided to recognize the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) as the sole representative of the Palestinian people. It then allowed Yasser Arafat to open a PLO office in Ankara in 1979.

In 1980, a crisis in Turkish–Israeli relations frayed following the decision by the Israeli government with the Jerusalem Act to combine the east and west sides

of the holy city into a unified capital. As a result, Turkey downgraded its diplomatic representation in Israel. According to Israeli diplomats, the Turkish decision was primarily driven by the aim of gaining financial assistance from Arab States.[26]

As evidenced here, the 1958 momentum did not last long. However it did not mean a complete dismantlement of Turkish–Israeli relations: despite Ankara's condemnations of Israel's policy toward the Palestinians, intelligence cooperation continued and the Israeli fighter aircrafts kept flying over the Turkish airspace. By supporting publicly the Arab position on the conflict, Ankara refrained from reaching the point to full normalization of its ties with Israel. It kept the relations in a cloud of opacity, but assessed at the same time that secret military and intelligence ties were valuable.

The 1996 strategic agreement

It was only in the years following the end of the Cold War that the Turkish leadership reassessed its strategy of distancing itself from Jerusalem. The government in Ankara looked with concern at its neighbors such as Syria, Iran, and Iraq improving their various arsenals (chemical and biological weapons, ballistic missiles). Additionally, terrorist groups targeting Turkey were receiving financial support from these three States, urging the Turkish government to reconsider its strategic options. Two of the architects of the Turkish–Israeli rapprochement would later summarize the common interests of both countries: "For Turkey, Israel represented a much-needed source of technologically advanced military equipment, which other Western sources denied it. For Israel, with its narrow territorial dimensions, Turkey offered geostrategic depth."[27] Moreover, Turkey and Israel shared commonalities in the building of their national identities, with both claiming European ties to differentiate themselves from the Arab Middle East.[28]

The rapprochement was also made easier because of the new momentum in the Israel–Arab relations following the Madrid conference in 1991. The nineties were a new period marked by the optimism borne out of the Oslo process between the Israelis and the Palestinians. As Jordan signed a peace treaty recognizing the existence of Israel in 1994 while a negotiation track was pursued with Syria, there were high expectations for normalization with the Hebrew State. As a result, the Turkish equation changed from the one of the sixties: under these conditions, cooperating with Israel would not antagonize the Arab States. The Oslo Agreement was signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization in September 1993. Only two months later, the Turkish Foreign Minister Hikmet Cetin was traveling to Jerusalem. Embassy-level diplomatic recognition was subsequently established. Exchanges between the two countries would be governed by a Security and Secrecy Agreement signed on May 31, 1994. But despite the Oslo mindset in the Middle East, the agreement indicated the willingness not to share all the information regarding the extent of the new cooperation. In other words, the opacity of the fifties was still the rule.

This first led to full diplomatic relations and a series of ministerial visits. In October 1994, again only nine days after the signing of Jordan–Israel peace agreements, Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Ciller travelled to Israel, making a first ever visit to the country of a Turkish head of government.[29]

During this critical period when both countries were discussing strategic cooperation, it is important to distinguish Turkey's views of the Israel–Jordan peace agreements from the Israel–Syria negotiations. Syria and Turkey were hostile States at that point, with Syrian ruler Hafez al Assad harboring the Kurdish party PKK, which was considered a terrorist organization by Ankara. In 1998, Turkey even threatened to invade Syria over the issue of the PKK. If the Oslo Peace Process and Jordan's recognition of Israel were seen as factors easing the cooperation with Israel, the negotiations with Syria were considered with more suspicion by the Turks. From that perspective, the rapprochement with Israel was understood more as an insurance policy or a counterbalance measure vis-à-vis Syria. Adding to the complexity of the triangle, Assad's Syria was in urgent need for new allies after the collapse of the USSR, and it had been turning to countries that were antagonists of Turkey: Greece and Armenia.[30]

In February 1996, a strategic agreement was signed between Ankara and Jerusalem: diplomatic relations were by then at full pace, as military cooperation intensified and bilateral trade bloomed. It is noteworthy that in both countries the driving forces behind the agreement were not the ministries of foreign affairs but the armed forces. As explained by one Israeli retired defense official who was interviewed, it was the Ministry of Defense in Tel Aviv that initiated the talks with Ankara without requesting approval from the diplomats based in Jerusalem.[31] On the Turkish side, the military had been a historical supporter of the cooperation, which it saw as a way to modernize its forces. The Turkish military leadership remained in the late nineties the primary agent of national security policy, a function that would soon be challenged by the rise of the Turkish National Security Council under the premiership of Erdogan.[32] The 1996 agreement was therefore the result of the military leadership in Ankara. It was also made possible because on the civilian side, political parties had started downgrading their usual anti-Israeli rhetoric following the Oslo process.

For Çevik Bir, former deputy chief of staff of Turkey's armed forces, the strategic agreement fulfilled three objectives: enhanced deterrence, enhanced coercive diplomacy, and enhanced standing in Washington.[33] It was logically at the military level that the rapprochement proved the most remarkable. In the following years, defense trade became a crucial component of the bilateral relation. Alongside general political–military affairs, the defense industry was the second pillar of the strategic dialogue that started in 1997 and gathered officials from both countries. Israeli Aircraft Industries won a $900 million deal to modernize the Turkish fleet of 54 F-4 Phantom aircraft and to equip them with 50 Popeye 1 air-to-ground missiles.[34] Israeli Aircraft Industries also received $150 million for the coproduction of hundreds of Popeye 2 air-to-ground missiles. Turkey turned to Israel for the upgrading of its M-60 tanks. Ankara also started buying various

sophisticated weapons systems. As a result, joint production ventures involving the major Israeli defense companies (Israel Aerospace Industries, Israel Military Industries, Rafael, and Elta) and Turkish counterparts emerged in the years following the signing of the strategic agreement. These close ties in the defense industry were made possible because of the Turkish military's control over the Undersecretariat for the Defense Industry, which was giving full responsibilities to the Chief of General Staff for the preparation of the armed forces' operational requirements and procurement orientations.[35]

The agreement also involved joint training activities such as military exercises. The two Air Forces met eight times annually (four times in each country) to perform one-week long exercises.[36] Starting in the summer of 1996, Turkish and Israeli navies conducted common naval maneuvers. In 1998, the Turks joined the US and Israel to hold "Reliant Mermaid," an annual joint naval and air force exercise focusing on search and rescue operations. The trilateral training would work for 12 years until Ankara halted its participation after the Mavi Marmara flotilla crisis. All in all, there was the feeling of a honeymoon between the two countries. "For Jerusalem, the intimacy between the two governments was second only to US–Israel relations," Efraim Inbar, professor of political studies at Bar-Ilan University, wrote in retrospect.[37]

Scholars depict the 1996 agreement as the "culmination of a historical trend that began during the Cold War but did not fully surface until after the demise of the Soviet Union."[38] This view provides a narrative of natural evolution of the Turkey–Israel alliance, as if its crises were only momentary pauses. But it is also possible to look at the relation the other way around. As a matter of fact, empirical data tend to tell us that periods of cooperation were shorter than periods of suspension. Like the pact in 1958, the rapprochement in the nineties may have been the result of a very specific combination of positive factors: the common need for a security partnership, the Oslo momentum, the presence of strong actors on both sides inclined to conduct the rapprochement. There was then nothing natural about the partnership. As the following decade evidences, it only took changes in all of these factors to see the bilateral relation unravelling.

The crisis in Israel–Turkey relationship[39]

By the end of 2001, the second Intifada erupting, the election of Ariel Sharon in Israel and the 9/11 attacks in the US, had caused the hopes of a peace process in the Middle East to all but disappear. On November 3, 2002, the Justice and Development Party (in Turkish *dalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, abbreviated AKP) won the general elections in Turkey and its leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, was nominated Prime Minister. Created only a year before the election, AKP was in itself a revolution in Turkish politics. Although its foundations were to be found in Islamism, it claimed to be a center-right wing formation that would not challenge the country's traditional secularism. Erdoğan's rhetoric combined social conservatism and economic liberalism, and his followers presented themselves as "conservative democrats."[40]

The Israelis were initially worried that the AKP challenged the basis of the bilateral relations, but the new government in Ankara did not do so, at least in its first years. The military cooperation continued, the trade kept rising, and Erdoğan visited Israel in May 2005. At the same time, Turkey was ambitiously redesigning its foreign policy under the supervision of the chief advisor to Erdoğan, Ahmet Davutoğlu. A former scholar, Davutoğlu had written a seminal book, *Strategic Depth*, in 2001, which aimed to provide a new roadmap for future Turkish governments. Using the German concept of *lebensraum* (literally "living space"), he argued that Turkey's geopolitical destiny was to dominate a sphere of influence encompassing the Middle East, the Balkans, and the Caucasus.[41]

In the following years, when Davutoğlu became foreign policy advisor to the Prime Minister, he applied this theory to Turkey's regional relations. Specifically, Davutoğlu and Erdoğan believed in the idea of a "zero-problem neighborhood policy" that would allow the country to cultivate ties with all countries in its vicinity without ideological limitations. In other words, Ankara would no longer constrain itself by a dilemma between the West and the East, and it would become the center of gravity, the junction of the two worlds. Such a grand strategy was surely ambitious, and moreover, it negated the traditional logic of the zero-sum game in the Middle East, according to which the Turkish–Israeli alliance had been built. Soon, the decision-makers in Jerusalem observed worryingly the consequences of the new Turkish foreign policy as it started a process of rapprochement with two hostile neighbors: Syria and Iran.

Turkish–Iranian cooperation grew in earnest in 2004, when both countries signed an agreement on security cooperation, with a particular emphasis on counterterrorism, border security, and intelligence sharing. Energy ties also expanded, as in July 2007, Turkey and Iran signed a memorandum of understanding to transport 30 billion cubic meters of Iranian and Turkmen natural gas to Europe.[42] The deal foresaw the construction of two separate pipelines to ship gas from Iranian and Turkmen gas fields.

Meanwhile, the Turkey–Syria reconciliation that developed throughout the 2000s was epitomized in 2009 by a three-day military maneuver involving ground forces of both countries. It evidenced the new level of cooperation between Ankara and Damascus, confirmed a month later by President Gül's visit to Syria. The improvement of both bilateral relations was to symbolize Davutoğlu's principle of "zero-problem neighborhood policy."

This new Turkish foreign policy was soon portrayed as a case of "neo-Ottomanism." Arabic newspapers widely portrayed Davutoğlu as the official "architect of new Ottomanism," and in some cases used false quotes in which Davutoğlu allegedly claimed to be a "neo-Ottoman." Despite the Turkish foreign minister's public denial, this vision persisted.[43] This terminology of "new Ottomans" or "neo-Ottomanism" blurred more than it enlightened Turkish policies. It engendered many controversies and misunderstanding for the observers of Turkish politics that sometime over exaggerated the Erdoğan enterprise in the Middle East, as well as his means to implement it.[44]

But what was Israel's role in this scheme? In Davutoğlu's original vision, the country was explicitly defined as an artificial creation, "a geopolitical tumor," and "a state that is politically foreign to that geography."[45] Concerns grew in earnest in Jerusalem as policymakers witnessed the rise of Davutoğlu alongside Erdoğan in Turkish politics. The Turkish government also started engaging with the Palestinian movement Hamas, considered a terrorist organization by Israel, hosting a delegation of their representatives in January 2006.[46]

But in spite of this backdrop, the Turkish–Israeli relationship did not yet deteriorate. It is only by the end of the 2000s that the AKP government started to demonstrate its discontent over the Israeli treatment of the Palestinians. In particular, the IDF operation "Cast Lead" targeting Hamas in the Gaza Strip that started on December 27, 2008 provoked a rift that eventually would tear the relationship apart. Prime Minister Erdoğan was said to take offense to the fact that the Israeli government neither shared information nor consulted him prior to the attack on Gaza.[47] Additionally, the scale of the attack engendered a massive outrage in the Arab world, a phenomenon that the Turkish leader could not ignore as he was working on improving Ankara's relations with Arab countries. After all, the zero-sum game logic still prevailed.

This led on January 29, 2009 to Erdoğan's condemnation of Israel's "Cast Lead" operation during one of the plenary sessions of the Davos Summit right in front of Israeli President Shimon Peres.[48] The Davos episode turned the Turkish Prime Minister into a hero in Arab countries. In the following months, the more the Israel–Turkey tensions unraveled, the more Turkey's image in the Arab world was becoming positive.[49] In addition, the rapprochement between Erdoğan's Turkey and Palestinian Hamas in Gaza along the preservation of close relations with Fatah, allowed Ankara to play a role of mediator between Palestinian factions.[50] Consequently, by the end of 2010, the debate in the opinion pages of the leading Arabic newspapers was not whether Turkey had new imperialistic ambitions but which similarities could be seen between Erdoğan and Gamal Abd el Nasser, the Egyptian ruler and perennial figure of Arab nationalism.[51]

On the Israeli front, the first consequences were felt in the decrease of high-level visits and the inflation of anti-Israeli rhetoric in Turkish politics. Events unfolded like a series of escalating accidents. In September 2009, while traveling to Israel, Ahmet Davutoğlu, by then Foreign Minister, was refused access to the Gaza Strip by Israeli authorities. In reaction, Turkey cancelled the participation of the Israeli Air Force to the military exercise "Anatolian Eagle" in October of the same year. The year 2010 deepened the bilateral crisis. Military exchanges were significantly diminished and in the spring, Israeli officials publicly expressed concerns over the nomination of Hakan Fidan as Head of Turkey's National Intelligence Organization. A close friend of Erdoğan, Fidan was seen as a pro-Iranian figure by the Israelis. According to that view, his alleged agenda would compromise intelligence exchanges with Tel Aviv.[52] Several officials from the Ministry of Defense in Tel Aviv described Fidan as "the man of Tehran in Ankara."[53] "He is the person who sold Israel's secrets to the Iranians," Israeli intelligence officials said of Fidan to

the daily *Haaretz.*[54] Later on, Fidan was also believed by the Israelis to have played an instrumental role in a clash that till this day left scars on the Turkish–Israeli relation: the *Mavi Marmara* incident.

The *Mavi Marmara* was a passenger ship bought by the Turkish NGO Humanitarian Relief Foundation in 2010, which intended to defy the Israeli blockade over Gaza in May 2010. While in international waters, the "freedom flotilla" composed of six ships was asked by Israeli Naval Forces to divert its trajectory to Ashdod Port, but the flotilla declined and was boarded in international waters. Activists and Israeli commandos engaged in a violent clash that led to the death of nine NGO members and the injuring of ten Israeli soldiers. Although a cloud of controversy surrounded the action of the *Mavi Marmara* flotilla – Israel argued that the IDF intervention was legal, in that the ship was not containing any humanitarian aid – it then triggered uproar in the public opinions all around the world.[55] Eventually, it became the "point of no return" between Turkey and Israel, or at least according to the perceptions of diplomats of both sides.[56] Starting in the following weeks, political dialogue between both countries ceased with Israel's government refusing to apologize for the clash over the Turkish flotilla, and the authorities of Turkey blocking not only bilateral cooperation but Israel–NATO cooperation as well, as we will see later.

In the following years, there have been several occasions when Israel and Turkey seemed poised to normalize their relations again. In early 2013, after three years of deterioration, Israeli diplomats were hoping to restore the ties: several high-level meetings had taken place, including between the heads of intelligence in Cairo. In a carefully theatrical phone call, Prime Minister Netanyahu conveyed his apologies to Erdoğan over the loss of life in the Mavi Marmara raid. The Turkish leader accepted them and an initial agreement was reached on compensation. Expectations were high in Jerusalem and observers believed that Turkey was by now revamping its Middle Eastern policy against the backdrop of the Syrian crisis. Indeed, supporting the revolution against the Syrian ruler, Turkey's assertiveness was progressively seen as an ill-advised and perilous escalation of the conflict. In particular, Turkey's support to the rebels, including fringes among them that were identified as extremist factions (e.g. *Jabhat al Nusra*) led many to wonder what exactly the objective driving Ankara's policy was in the Syrian civil war.[57]

But notwithstanding this small window of opportunity, the relations between Ankara and Jerusalem got worse, not better. In the summer of 2013, Erdoğan accused Israel of being involved in the military coup that ousted former Egyptian President Morsi. Despite the implementation of compensation by the Israelis, the Turkish leadership kept repeating his strong aversion for Israel and Zionism that the Prime Minister even described as a "crime against humanity."[58] By the first months of 2015, when I returned to Tel Aviv and Jerusalem for a new series of interviews, my interlocutors were no longer expecting anything. A consensus had emerged within the military and the diplomatic corps that Turkey, at least under the reign of the AKP, was not interested in restoring the ties with Israel. The rift was not only affecting the level of political leadership but the working

level of diplomats and officers who were exchanging only on an ad hoc, informal basis. "There are no more official meetings between the ministries of foreign affairs," said one high-level diplomat in Jerusalem. She added "there are some informal exchanges at the working level, for instance people like Amos Gilad [Political Director of the Ministry of Defense] keeps his close contacts with the armed forces, but the political pressures prevent any initiative."[59]

Arms sales were slowing down and fears of anti-Semitic attitudes in Turkey were leading Israeli tourists to progressively avoid Turkey as a destination.[60] If in 2013 government insiders were still optimistic, they had completely become disillusioned two years later. Again, in December 2015, a new hope emerged when Erdogan told journalists that "normalization with Israel" was possible.[61] Cooperation in the field of gas exploration in the East Mediterranean sea was suggested as potential means of rapprochement. But the reactions from Israeli officials were at best skeptical. In a heated exchanged, a former foreign minister in the Netanyahu cabinet told us, "we should not waste time and energy with a government that still hosts Hamas operational headquarters in Istanbul […] Erdogan does not even hide the fact that he admires Hitler!"[62]

In a more balanced way, a diplomat downplayed the Erdoğan speech and argued:

> nothing will be possible under the current leadership, both in Israel and Turkey: there's such a level of distrust and contempt between Netanyahu and Erdoğan that the bilateral relation got too personal and you can only wait for new faces that may look at it in different ways.[63]

In the years that followed Erdoğan's election, Israelis also witnessed the weakening of its long-time supporter in the Turkish political system: the military. Erdoğan launched massive investigations targeting high-level officers allegedly involved in a potential military takeover. This included in 2014 a life sentence against the former chief of the general staff, Ilker Basbug. Given the fact that the Turkish military leadership staged three coups from 1960 to 1980, Erdoğan's allegations were not farfetched but there was for many observers a heavy political dimension, with the AKP asserting its new dominance in the power struggle. Noticeably, many of the officers jailed were later freed, including Basbug.[64] The intensity of the struggle between Erdoğan and the armed forces reached a new level with the failed coup attempt in July 2016. One of the direct consequences was the removal of approximately 50 percent of the generals and flag officers. Erdoğan's backlash against the Turkish military establishment following the 2016 failed coup attempt put at odds any expectation from the Israeli side to reset the cooperation between the two armed forces.

The American strategy vis-à-vis the partnership

Because one of the expected outcomes of the periphery alliance was to turn Israel into a strategic asset for the US, it is worth looking at the American

reactions to these developments. The American government had been informed of the development in the Israel–Turkey relations from the beginning. Starting in 1957–1958, the Department of State and the CIA closely monitored the exchanges between the two US allies in the Middle East. According to Israeli archives, by late 1958, the Turkish government had received encouragement from Secretary of State John Foster Dulles on two occasions.[65] Some scholars emphasize that the US remained a distant supporter of the partnership during these years. This may largely be due to the fact that the partnership itself was yet a modest initiative. After the end of the Cold War, the US support was conveyed much more openly. In May 1997, Nicholas Burns, then spokesman for the State Department, stated that it was "a strategic objective of the United States that Turkey and Israel ought to enhance their military cooperation […] it seems to us natural and positive that Israel and Turkey would walk together militarily."[66]

In the nineties, the US Department of Defense became closely involved in the military cooperation between the two. The US armed forces facilitated the joint exercises and the Israelis reported to the Office of the Secretary of Defense on the defense trade deals with Turkey that may have involved indirect transfer of US technologies. Not only did the administration of Bill Clinton support the rapprochement, but the American Jewish interest groups in Washington made as well the case to the Congress. "The American–Jewish community has embraced the strong relationship that has been established between Turkey and Israel" declared Daniel Mariaschin, the director of B'nai B'rith – a Jewish–American advocacy group – to the *Turkish Daily News*.[67] Interestingly, this was the same Mariaschin who two decades later would support the Israeli–Greek relationship as a result of the tensions with Erdoğan's government.[68]

Subsequently, when the relations between Israel and Turkey deteriorated significantly at the end of the 2000s, the US government was placed in a delicate situation. In particular, the administration of President Barack Obama had to navigate between the concerns and the sensitivity of two regional allies. The challenge was to find the right balance between reassuring one ally without antagonizing the other one. But soon, the Turkish–Israeli dispute spilled over into the NATO scene.

Since 1994, NATO has had a diplomatic relation with Israel through the partnership called the Mediterranean Dialogue.[69] Activities (exercises, conferences, meetings) included on the Mediterranean Dialogue agenda have to be all approved by the national authorities of NATO members. However, as the Turkish–Israeli relation deteriorated, the Turkish delegation at the NATO Headquarters in Brussels started challenging, and sometimes blocking, partnership events that included Israel. The American insistence on including Israel in these activities was met with strong defiance. Turkish officials perceived US pressures against Ankara in the NATO arena vis-à-vis partnership with Israel as an unfair treatment. Diplomats frequently complained that the US should give priority to the interests of a NATO ally, and not to those of a mere partner like Israel. A NATO officer working at the UN Headquarters explained:

The Turkish officials are extremely annoyed at the level of the North Atlantic Council when they feel that there is more solidarity with a country [Israel] which is a mere partner than with one [Turkey] which is a full member of the alliance.[70]

In 2011 the announcement of the coming deployment of a US radar in Turkey – as part of NATO's missile defense project – led to a deep controversy over the issue of the information gathered by the radar and the possibility that this data could be shared with Israel. In practice, information coming from a US radar is fused with US intelligence data and assessments and shared with allies, including Israel, according to the policy decided in Washington. This quickly became an issue of domestic politics in Ankara with the opposition accusing the government of hosting a military system to defend Israel. Davutoğlu and Erdoğan repeatedly underlined that the logic of the radar was to protect Turkey and dismissed the likelihood of sharing data with Israel.[71]

In 2012, Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoğlu stated publicly that Israel would not be allowed to attend the NATO Summit taking place in Chicago in May of that year. A senior Turkish official interviewed by the daily newspaper *Hurriyet* explained that the Ankara would oppose the Israeli participation "unless they issue a formal apology and pay compensation for the Turkish citizens their commandos killed in international waters."[72]

In September of the same year, the US government through his ambassador to Ankara, Francis Ricciardone, persuaded the Turks not to cancel the NATO Minotaur exercise because of Israeli presence. In an email that was later leaked to the press, Ricciardone conveyed the message that the Israelis would not be active participants:

if the NATO Minotaur exercise happens, IDF would limit their participation "observers." Thus there would be scant chance of IDF + TU [Turkey] forces being credibly accused of "exercising" together: The Israelis will be observing, not exercising nor "participating," in the active sense of the other NATO + partner forces.[73]

Ricciardone's message seemed effective as Turkey enabled the Israelis to join the exercise.

There are many other cases in which US influence did not succeed. Turkey blocked Israel's participation in the NATO operation "Active Endeavor" in the Mediterranean Sea, although the operation had included ships from partner countries since 2004 (Morocco, Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Finland, Sweden) and despite the fact that NATO and Israel had already signed an agreement in 2010 that was supposed to lead to participation to the operation.[74]

On the another hand, the Israelis sometimes felt like the Americans were cajoling the Turkish government to avoid Erdoğan's game of brinkmanship, and, since late 2014, to get Turkey to participate to the US-led coalition against ISIL in Syria. In an article explicitly titled "Turkey is no American Ally," Efraim

Inbar from Bar-Ilan University expressed strong criticisms that reflected a fair account of views in Tel Aviv:

> It is not clear why Washington puts up with such Turkish behavior. The Obama administration seems to be unable to call a spade a spade. It refuses to acknowledge that Turkey is a Trojan horse in NATO, and that Ankara undermines American interests in the Middle East and elsewhere.[75]

All in all, the developments in the Israel–Turkey relations tend to moderate the importance of the US influence on the two countries. US governments did play a role from the outset to support the rapprochement, although they did not go as far in the trilateral cooperation as with the Iranians. Later, the US also tried to reconcile both sides: this was no coincidence as Netanyahu made the phone call in 2013 to Erdoğan only a few hours after US President Obama travelled to Israel. It is worth noticing that the value for US interests in the Israel–Turkey partnership has also evolved. Whereas it was primarily seen in the late fifties as a good way to counter Soviet influence in the Middle East, it appears today as a potential anchor of stability in light of the upheavals in Arab countries such as Egypt, Syria, or Iraq. But if the US aimed to play the role of external supporter, it was challenged by another exogenous factor: the reactions from Arab countries, which historically has impacted much more significantly the Israel–Turkey partnership.

The Arab factor in Turkish policies

From the outset of the periphery alliance, Arab reactions played a major role in defining Turkey's position vis-à-vis Israel. Although Turkey's founder Mustapha Atatürk envisioned his country as a Western-oriented State, this did not imply stopping diplomatic, trade, and cultural relations with the Arab world. The history of Turkish–Arab relations is complex as it is surrounded by heavily negative public perceptions of the Turks in the Arab world. For instance in Lebanon, the last edition of the official history textbook for high school students published in 2010 details at length the severe treatment of Lebanese under the Ottoman rule, particularly the torture of dissidents or the deprivation of nutrition during the First World War.[76] European past colonial enterprises in the Middle East shape the understanding of Western policies in the region but the Ottoman rule is not forgotten either. This relates to the image of "the terrible Turk" used by the anthropologist Ernest Gellner, an expression that encapsulates the traditional Arab view of Turkey as the inheritor of Ottoman recklessness.[77] Until Erdoğan's enterprise in the Middle East, this narrative of the "terrible Turk" was indeed a common one among intellectuals and politicians in the Arab world.[78]

Turkey's membership of NATO in 1952 and its rapprochement with Israel during the same decade were condemned by Arab rulers in Egypt and Syria, where nationalism – whether its Nasserist form or Baathist form – built itself against Western influence in the Middle East and Zionism. During the Cold War, Turkey's Middle East policy remained one of neutrality and cautious

non-interference in regional power plays. It did join the Baghdad Pact and cooperated with Israel, but Turkish governments did not design a regional strategy, except to prevent itself from getting trapped into military competition. This did not always succeed and Arab regimes pressured Turkey in the sixties to abandon its ties with Israel in exchange for Arab support to Ankara's position on Cyprus.[79] As mentioned earlier, the 1996 Strategic Agreement was only made possible because of the momentum brought about by the Oslo Peace Process.

The following decade witnessed an unprecedented situation with regards to Turkey's positioning in the Middle East. The collapse of the Israeli–Palestinian peace process and the rise of the second Intifada put an end to the momentum gained earlier. But at the same time, the new era starting with the AKP would rebalance the Turkish traditional Western-oriented foreign policy agenda toward the East. If Turkey had always been a topic of interest for the Arab political debate, this attention grew dramatically after the accession of the AKP to power in 2002 and its newly assertive foreign policy in the Middle East. For instance, although Ahmet Davutoğlu's seminal book, *Strategic Depth*, was not translated into English, the Al Jazeera Center for Studies published an Arabic version in 2010 that since then has been widely read and quoted. Arabic newspapers frequently use Davutoğlu's terminology and concepts such as strategic depth or zero-problems neighborhood policy. As a result, many books and academic articles published in the following years have been discussing Turkey's grand strategy, and its lessons as well as its "model" for the Arab world.[80]

By the end of the 2000s, Erdoğan's ambition to use Turkey's geographic position as leverage in its relations with both Europe and Middle Eastern countries was seen positively, in particular following Turkey's rapprochement with both Syria and Iran and its simultaneous tough stance against Israel. Under these circumstances, the expressions of "bridge" or "pivotal State" were often used by Arabic commentators to describe Turkey's foreign policy. Michel Naoufal, editor-in-chief of the Lebanese newspaper *Al Mustaqbal* and an expert on Turkey–Arab relations, believed in 2010 that "Turkey represents a safety valve in the Middle East."[81] During that period, Naoufal as well as other Arab intellectuals toned down the Arab fears of a new Turkish imperialism and rather characterized Turkey's agenda in the region as an enterprise of soft power.[82]

This sudden and exceptional infatuation for Turkey in Arab media was to crumble as quickly as it had appeared. At first, the Arab revolutions that started in Tunisia and Egypt seemed to reinforce the Turkish model in the Arab world. But by the summer of 2011, it had become clear that the Arab fascination for Turkey was backfiring. It is worth noticing the terminology of Bashar Al Assad, the Syrian ruler, when he talked about Erdoğan. In November 2012, he declared "[Erdoğan] considers himself the new Ottoman sultan and thinks he can control the region the same way the Ottomans did before" adding that Turkey's strategy in the Middle East went "from zero problem to zero friends."[83] Such rhetoric was now the mainstream discourse on Turkey in Syrian official outlets as well as in pro-Assad Media like Hezbollah's TV Channel *Al Manar* or Lebanese newspaper *As Safir*.

Even for the Arab thinkers supporting the revolution against the Syrian regime, Turkey's assertiveness was progressively seen as an ill-advised and perilous escalation of the conflict.[84] Besides, the simultaneous warming up of Turkey–Israel relations in March 2013, with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu apologizing to Turkey over the *Mavi Marmara* crisis, altered the positive narrative of Erdoğan as the "new Nasser." The presumed end of the Turkish–Israeli dispute was understood as Ankara lowering down its ambitions for cooperation with Arab Middle Eastern countries. It suddenly gave the feeling among Arab intellectuals that previous statements were merely a posture without any deep consequence on Turkish fundamental orientations.[85] The resentment over Ankara's rapprochement with Jerusalem logically resurrected old conspiracy theories on the "Zionist–Ottoman" plot against the Arabs.

A quick look at Turkey's recent fortunes and misfortunes in the Middle East may tempt observers to argue that Erdoğan's ambitions for his country, and particularly regarding a rapprochement with Arab neighbors, concluded in a dramatic failure. Such may be the impression while reading Arabic newspapers and academic articles. However, just like in the case of the erratic Israeli–Turkish partnership, this assessment is historically skewed as it overlooks the previous state of Turkish–Arab relations prior to Erdoğan's premiership. For decades, Turkey's image in the Arab world was shaped by the still vivid memories of the Arab nationalistic struggle against the Ottomans.

In that perspective, the Arab reactions to Turkish–Israeli relations played a significant role. This factor was not easily measurable or predictable for foreign-policymakers, as Turk–Arab relations have been troubled since the fall of the Ottoman Empire. In fact, the Turk–Arab relations prove to be as complicated as the ones with Israel. At the purely strategic level, Israel offered perspectives to Turkey that Arab powers could not: access to highly advanced military technology and training, facilitated contacts with the US. At the political-cultural level, Turkey shared commonalities with both sides. A secular Western-oriented State, Turkey obviously saw Israel as a country facing the same challenges in a region dominated by Arab countries. But it also perceived, especially since the rule of the AKP, the Muslim creed to be a profound bond with the Arab world. In the end, all these relations greatly fluctuated, sometimes because the Israeli–Arab conflict worsened, but sometimes also because Turkey tried as much as possible to benefit from both sides. This ambivalent position was, as mentioned earlier, a challenge clearly identified by Israeli officials in the fifties and it remained more or less the same till today.

All in all, the volatility of the bilateral relation was exacerbated by the deep personalization of the relations between the two countries. There has been a widely shared view in Israel and Turkey that the low level of cooperation between the two governments was first and foremost a result of the difficult relation between their leaders, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Benjamin Netanyahu.[86] On the other hand, it could be argued that historically, given the huge sensitivity of the matter, Turkish–Israeli cooperation was only made possible because of decisions at the highest level. Personal relations between leaders always mattered: after all, Ben-Gurion

was supportive of a partnership with Turkey also because he had lived in Istanbul and was influenced, as a Statesman, by the style of Atatürk.[87]

Moreover, the Arab factor that played a role over the last years is nothing new. We have seen that with the Suez War or, later, Nasser's pressures on Ankara affected Israeli–Turkish relations. In a sense, the nineties made observers forget the importance of the Arab factor because of the optimism borne out of the Oslo process and the momentum it engendered in the region.

All in all, it reveals the gap between the theory and the practice of the periphery doctrine. We see here how some of the early critics of the concept were proven right. Eban's cautious word on the limitations of building partnership on a presumably common antagonism with the Arab world finds echoes in the Turkish ambiguous attitude vis-à-vis Israel and Arab countries. However, this instability of the Turkey–Israel partnership would be nothing compared to the troubles experienced with the Iran–Israel relation.

Notes

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4 The Israeli–Iranian relationship

From close ally to existential threat

In comparison to the case of Turkey, the history of the Israel–Iran relationship has been made of a stronger cooperation but also of a bigger crisis that ended the relation after the Islamic Revolution in Tehran in 1979. Even more than the rapprochement between Ankara and Jerusalem, the Iranian–Israeli cooperation during the Cold War, in the intelligence and military domains fulfilled Ben-Gurion's grand strategy. It also epitomized the conspiracy theories in the Arab World on Zionist plans in the region. But conversely, the fall of the Shah and the rise of the Islamic Republic turned the former partners into archenemies, a situation that, even at its worst, the Israeli–Turkish dispute never reached. Like in Turkey, the alliance with Iran was determined by various factors such as the role of the armed forces and intelligence services, the external support from the US and finally, to a lesser extent, the Arab reactions. These elements are exposed in the following pages.

Iran and the establishment of modern Israel

When the United Nations General Assembly discussed the partition plan for Palestine on November 29, 1947, Iran, like Turkey, voted against it. The official statement from the Iranian delegation stated that "the two States recommended in the majority plan would not be viable, but would become a liability of world concern."[1] Despite this rebuttal, starting as soon as October 1949, the Israelis aimed to engage with the Iranians. The Jewish Agency representative in Tehran described Iranian support to the Arab cause as pure diplomatic posturing: "There is thus not much to fear from these descendants of Cyrus, the real Aryans of yesterday, who have become blood brothers of the Arabs."[2] There was an understanding that Iran feared Soviet expansionist ambitions in the Middle East and would look for ways to balance it. Additionally, Iran's Jewish community had not been the object of the persecution by the regime in Tehran. In fact, Aliyah Bet, the organization in charge of the clandestine immigration of Jews to Palestine, worked with the Iranian government to evacuate Jews from neighboring Iraq, where Zionism had been declared a crime by 1948 and Iraqi Jews had been forbidden to emigrate.

Eventually, Iran recognized de facto – but not *de jure* – Israel in 1950. To explain the decision, Iran argued at the level of the United Nations General Assembly that its decisions were not constrained by those of other Middle

Eastern countries – namely the Arab countries.[3] As a result, Tehran opened a low-level mission in the country, at the level of a consulate. However, it refused to allow Israel to do the same and moreover, only a year after its opening the Iranian mission in Israel was closed and the consul-general recalled, officially due to budgetary considerations. The government answered "This has nothing to do with Iran's de facto recognition of Israel. The decision is based on financial difficulties of the Treasury Department."[4]

It is only in 1960, during a press conference, that the Shah himself publicly acknowledged that this de facto recognition had been granted, aggravating a diplomatic crisis with Egypt.[5] In Egypt, the free officers' coup of 1952 brought to power Gamal Abdel Nasser who soon established an anti-Western regime with pan-Arab ambitions. The Nasserist rhetoric and the rapprochement with the USSR were engendering concerns equally in Iran and Israel and eventually created a common threat. After the US-led coup of 1953 that deposed the government of Mossadeq in Tehran, Iran had clearly sided with a Western bloc and joined the Baghdad Pact in 1955. In the second part of the fifties, both countries would start a process of cooperation to balance this Nasserist challenge.

From the beginning, the Iranian regime maintained ambiguity and opacity over its exchanges with Israel. To use the expression of R.K. Ramazani, the Shah adopted a policy of "calculated ambivalence."[6] It implied maintaining a healthy distance from the Jewish State while waiting for it to clarify its allegiances.[7] This caution was reflected in an answer given by the Shah in 1949. Asked by American journalists about Iranian potential recognition of Israel, he replied "We have not yet recognized Israel and as a Muslim country we will naturally have to discuss it with other Muslim countries before we do."[8]

There is today evidence that during that period, Israel was involved, alongside the US, in the establishment of the SAVAK, the Iranian secret police. Despite these developments, the Iranian diplomatic positions on the Israel–Arab conflict remained the same.[9] In 1956, Israel opened an unofficial office in Teheran that dealt with trade relations. Its first representative, Zvi Doriel, played a major role in paving the way for a bilateral strategic dialogue. Interestingly, a diplomatic cable coming from the US Embassy in Tehran and dated November 19, 1956, detailed the influence strategy of Doriel with local media outlets, a strategy that sometimes included financial donations.[10]

While the Iranians were being cautious vis-à-vis the Israelis, relations between Tehran and the Arab world were deteriorating. Although the Shah had denounced the Suez operation led by Israel, France and the United Kingdom, Iran joined the Suez Canal Users' Association, an organization opposed by Nasser.[11] More and more, the Middle East was falling into its own Cold War with rigid blocs facing each other.[12]

The building of an intimate partnership

In the first months of 1957, the Shah asked General Bakhtiar, head of the SAVAK, to explore potential cooperation with the Israelis in the field of

intelligence.[13] There was an understanding in the Iranian intelligence community that the Israeli Mossad had developed analytical capabilities on the Arab world that would be extremely precious to them. Although there were already exchanges with the CIA, the Iranians felt that the Americans primarily focused on the bipolar competition with the USSR and took less into consideration the regional developments in terms of military balances and internal power plays in the Arab world. Therefore, Bakhtiar flew to Israel and met with Isser Harel, director of the Mossad by then, and Yaakov Karoz, one of Harel's close advisers.[14] The meeting was a starting point of an impressive rapprochement. In coming years, the Israelis would surpass the Americans with regards to the number of their intelligence officers training the SAVAK.

Like in the case of Turkey, these clandestine developments were well known by the CIA. A classified report from the American intelligence community issued in the late 1950s clearly captured the Israeli initiative:

> The main purpose of the Israeli relationship with Iran was the development of a pro-Israel and anti-Arab policy on the part of Iranian officials. Mossad has engaged in joint operations with Savak over the years since the late 1950s. Mossad aided Savak activities and supported the Kurds in Iraq. The Israelis also regularly transmitted to the Iranians intelligence reports on Egypt's activities in the Arab countries, trends and developments in Iraq, and Communist activities affecting Iran.[15]

Moreover, there was an economic incentive for strengthening the ties. During the summer of 1957, a secret visit by a representative of the National Iranian Oil Company was organized outside of Tel Aviv. The meeting laid out a deal to import Iranian oils to Israel via the Eilat–Ashkelon pipeline. The Israeli logic was to bypass the Suez channel controlled by Egypt. The pipeline came into operation only a few months later, by the end of 1957, and Iranian oil started being transported to Israel at the price of $1.30 per barrel.[16] Neither Iran nor Israel acknowledged the existence of this oil deal but it was common knowledge and stirred criticisms from Arab regimes.

In the fall of 1957, a message was sent by the Iranian Embassy in Paris to the Israeli representation in the French capital to convene a meeting between diplomats from both countries.[17] The Shah sent Bakhtiar to lead the exchanges. On the other side, the Israeli delegation was headed by Reuven Shiloah, who was – as we recall – leading similar efforts with Turkey at the same time. The two sides agreed to set up secured communication channels and to plan regular meetings on strategic issues of common interest.

In early 1958, David Ben-Gurion wrote a letter to the Shah to support this new relation. To give a sense of history and destiny to this rapprochement, the Israeli Prime Minister evoked the historical episode during which Xerxes, the King of Persia in the fifth century before Jesus Christ, allowed Jewish population their right to return to Israel. The Shah is said to have replied to Ben-Gurion

"The memory of what Xerxes has done to your people is precious to me and I will do all I can to pursue this ancient tradition."[18]

In his book *Mission for My Country* published in 1961, the Shah would repeat this rhetoric:

> We never believed in discrimination based on race, color, or creed, and have often provided a haven for oppressed people of backgrounds different from our own […] For example, it was characteristic of Cyrus the Great that, when he conquered Babylon, he allowed the Jews, who had been exiled there by King Nebuchadnezzar after the conquest of Jerusalem in 597 BC, to return to Palestine with their sacred vessels and rebuild their destroyed temples.[19]

Correspondence between Tehran and Jerusalem evidenced the rapprochement in early 1958. Zvi Doriel, Israeli diplomat, was sent to Tehran to evaluate the progress. In early February 1958, Doriel wrote to Jerusalem that "relations with the National Iranian Oil Company are excellent. There is an obvious improvement in Israel–Iran relations in general."[20] On February 4, Pinchas Sapir, Israel's Minister of commerce and industry, stopped in Tehran on his way to Asia to discuss trade cooperation with his counterpart. This was the first time ministers from both countries were meeting.

Official visits between Jerusalem and Tehran subsequently increased and El Al, the Israeli airline, even opened a regular line between the two capitals. The following August 10, a memorandum was signed in Tehran between the Israeli minister of finance Levi Eshkol and the Iranian director of the national company of oil that approved the selling of Iranian oil to Israel.

Noticeably, the Iraqi Revolution of the summer of 1958 had a distinct impact on the Iranian strategic calculus. At first, Israeli observers believed Iran would react in a similar fashion as Turkey. On July 24, 1958, Zvi Doriel wrote that "in the light of this situation, relations with Israel are becoming more vital […] the security services are most enthusiastic, and have even raised the possibility of a pact with Israel for restraining Arab nationalism."[21]

However, it appeared that the Shah was not so sure and still wanted to maintain good relations with the new regime of Qassim in Baghdad. The concrete results were a pressure from the Shah on the Iranian press to cover the events in Iraq in an accommodating way with a reinforcement of diplomatic resources at the Iranian Embassy in Baghdad. The Shah hoped Qassim's Iraq could become a partner. According to assessments written by the Israeli diplomats based in Tehran, the Iranians "welcomed Nasser's anti-Communist address and official propaganda consistently stresses the premise that the Iraqi ruler aspires to ward off Communism and is able to do so."[22] Israelis believed this Iranian position was the product of its Foreign Minister Hekmat "whose attitude is conciliatory and Arab-orientated […] expressed both toward Iraq and Egypt, denying the Communist tendencies apparent."[23]

As a reaction, the Israeli government aimed to convince the Iranians that Nasser's rhetoric was "fraudulent," that:

Egypt, which is putting forward this slogan [war against Zionist and Communism], maintains close ties with all the Communist countries and in actuality is facilitating the penetration of these countries into the Middle East. The significance of this slogan is in fact a war against Israel by means of Communism.[24]

Iranian miscalculation on the new Iraqi regime surfaced quickly. Only days after the coup, the Deputy Premier Abdul Sallam Aref signed an agreement with Egypt committing to close cooperation between the two countries in the political, military and economic fields. Likewise, diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and Soviet satellite countries were strengthened. Furthermore, the Iraqi ruler Qassim soon turned his attention to Iran and declared that the 1937 Treaty between the two countries regarding the Shatt-al-Arab waterway was unacceptable, claiming Iraqi sovereignty over the entire river. By 1959, Qassim started ordering the Iraqi forces to block the tankers of the National Iranian Oil Company from moving down the Shatt-al-Arab. Additionally, Qassim offered return from exile to Mustafa Barzani, the leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, who was enabled then to launch attacks on Iran from northern Iraq.[25]

With the events in Iraq unfolding, Iran came to consider that maintaining ties with Israel was a necessary strategic insurance and by the end of 1959, it allowed Israel to post a military attaché to the Israeli mission in Teheran. Although both countries maintained opacity regarding their exchanges, it was public knowledge by the end of that decade that officials from Israel and Iran had been in close contact. In October 1960, during a briefing given to the Knesset, Ben-Gurion explained in a rather ambiguous way that these relations were "unhidden but unofficial friendly relations … This friendship is based on mutual benefit for the two countries."[26]

Eventually, Ben-Gurion visited Iran in 1961. On December 5, on his way to Burma, Israel's Prime Minister spent the night at the Shah's villa at Tehran airport and met with several Iranian government officials. Ben-Gurion had hoped his visit would be treated as an official one that would signal the normalization of the bilateral relations. However, the Iranian authorities refrained, and Prime Minister Ali Amini explained to Ben-Gurion on his arrival that Iran's relations with Israel would have to remain secret: "our relationship is like the true love that exists between two people outside of wedlock. It is better this way."[27]

Amini's description echoes the "mistress" syndrome that characterized Israel's relation with Turkey. Although the news of Ben-Gurion's visit was reported by the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, Iranian authorities refused to comment on it.[28] There was a similar incident a year later, when Foreign Minister Golda Meir travelled to Tehran and Radio Israel announced her meeting with Prime Minister Amini, a release that displeased the Iranian officials.

The increasing knowledge of Israeli–Iranian ties was challenging the Shah on the domestic front. In early 1963, a Shia religious leader in Qom, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, was becoming more vocal in his condemnations of the regime: he repeatedly denounced the Shah's moral corruption and accused him

of being an "agent of Zionism."[29] In that context, Israeli attempts for normalization were ill-timed. While the decision-makers in Jerusalem seemed not to have realized this situation, Israeli operatives in Iran were fully aware. A US diplomatic cable coming from the Embassy in Tehran, dated April 2, 1965, described an exchange with David Tourgeman, second secretary of the Israeli mission in Iran. It emphasized that despite the enthusiasm in Jerusalem for an enhanced cooperation with the Iranians, the Israeli government also "realized the delicate position of the Iranian Government in recognizing both Israeli and many Arab countries, and therefore did not push contacts too much."[30]

During this period, Mossad and Savak cooperated on the Yemeni file. In 1962, Nasser, backed by the Soviet Union, sent 70 000 soldiers to intervene in Yemen alongside the rebels led by Abdullah al-Sallal. On the other side, the Iranians were supporting the Royal forces of Imam al Badr. As the Iranians were granted access to Saudi Arabia's territory, they started channeling ammunition to al Badr's forces. But according to Sohrab Sobhani, it happened at least twice that Israeli aircraft, using Iranian stickers, flew over Saudi airspace to provide weapons to Yemeni forces.[31] Only a few officers on both sides knew about the operation and it confirmed the importance of keeping secrecy as the primary rule.

In the seventies, it is believed that the Iranian secret mission in Israel included six diplomats but official records assigned these representatives to the Iranian embassy in Bern, Switzerland. "Bern 2" was the codename given to the Iranian secret mission in Israel by the Foreign Ministry in Tehran.[32] On the other side, the successive Israeli governments tried to push for a more public bilateral relation. Golda Meir's inner circle of advisors tried to put a sign at the entrance of the building of the Israeli Mission in Tehran to go further but Meir eventually dismissed the idea. Both the United Kingdom and the United States called the Shah to publicly recognize Israel and therefore to shift from its de facto recognition to a *de jure* one.

Despite this setback for the Israeli proponents of normalization, the bilateral cooperation grew bigger and much closer than the one with Turkey. The scale of exchanges between the two countries was so high that the *Financial Times* was rightfully writing by 1969 that "the evidence of Iran–Israeli friendship and cooperation has recently become so overwhelming that the alliance will soon be as undeniable as the El Al airliners which regularly pass on scheduled service between Tehran and Tel Aviv."[33] As the seventies started, a confidential memorandum from the US Embassy in Tehran asserted that the Arab diplomats in the Iranian capital knew very well of this relation. With regards to the Israelis, they "were willing to forego the ceremonial trappings of diplomacy as long as the real substance was present while the Arabs could tolerate the substance of close Iran–Israel relations as long as this was not apparent from surface indications."[34]

The Shah himself was asked by journalists about turning the relation into an official one. Although he acknowledged the ties, he argued that moving to the level of open diplomatic relations was not necessary and evoked the application of the UN Resolution of November 1967 as a prerequisite.[35] The reference to the

UN Resolution underlined how much the Iranian leader evaluated the exchanges with Israel in relation with the Arab reactions.

It is worth noting that if Turkey had been maintaining a rather neutral position in Middle East power plays, Iran on the contrary was entirely part of them. As a regional power allied with the US, it was a direct competitor to Nasser's Egypt. The Egyptian ruler did not refrain to sponsor anti-regime forces inside Iran. For instance, in 1963, Khomeini had received $150 000 from the Egyptian government to organize riots.[36] Two years later, in October 1965, the Syrian regime claimed that the province of Khuzestan in southern Iran was an Arab land that had to be called "Arabistan."[37]

In that perspective, the calculated opacity of Iranian public statements regarding their relations with Israel was not illogic. It fulfilled two complementary objectives: at the diplomatic level, it avoided severe condemnations from the Arab world while at the strategic level, it deterred Arab rulers who were left wondering about the extent of this alliance. The Iranian regime had not always considered the Arab factor as relevant. In fact, the Shah initially dismissed the existence of an Arab factor that would put pressure on his policy. In the fifties, he had declared:

> We are not intimidated by anybody who tries to tell us whom we should have for our friends, and we make no alliances merely for the sake of alliances or of vague principles, but only in support of our enlightened self-interest. We cultivate the friendship of all, and are prepared to take advantage of every country's technical skills if to do so does not prejudice our interests or our independence. This gives us great freedom of action – much more than that enjoyed by any dogma-ridden state.[38]

However, in reality, the Shah regularly sided with the Arabs against Israel. During the October 1973 war, Iran applied the oil embargo imposed by OPEC against countries supporting Israel and cut the oil supplies to Israel. The years that followed the 1973 war saw the Iranian leader trying to design a balanced strategy that would both sustain its military cooperation with Israel and warm up Iran's relations with the Arab world. In 1975, the Shah met for an interview with the Egyptian journalist Mohammed Heikal and an influential figure in the Cairo political circles. The Iranian leader started admitting the military cooperation with Israel but then explained "now the situation has changed […] Israeli media are attacking us energetically. We advised Israel that it cannot conquer the entire Arab world."[39]

In November 1975, the Arab States brought to a vote at the UN General Assembly a resolution equating Zionism with racism. The talks in New York led to tensions between the Iranian UN Delegation and the officials in Teheran. The latter recommended abstaining whereas the delegates at the UN made the case for approving the resolution. "We didn't want to give the image that we were blindly following the US and Israel," argued Ambassador Mehdi Ehsassi, who was a member of the Iranian UN Delegation during this period.[40] Although the

Iranians eventually approved the resolution, it is said that the Shah, fearing the consequences of such a move on his relations with the US and Israel, personally called the Iranian Delegation to change the decision only to hear that the vote had already taken place a day before.[41]

For a while, it seemed as if the Shah's shaky strategy was achievable: in Egypt, President Sadat progressively moved away from the USSR orbit and started cooperating with the US and, eventually, with Israel, toward a peace agreement that would lead to Sadat's historical visit to Jerusalem in 1977 and to the Camp David Accords in 1978. Even Syria appeared more pragmatic, as its new ruler Hafez al Assad signed the Agreement on Disengagement with Israel over the Golan Heights in May 1974. The Shah seemed to believe the newly improved relation between Iran and Sadat's Egypt would pave the way to better relations with the Arab countries altogether. This was misjudging both the regional and domestic reactions to Sadat's decision to recognize Israel. The fall-outs occurred while the Shah was already facing his own fall: in 1979, Egypt was excluded from the Arab League and in October 1981, Sadat was assassinated by Islamic militants.

While the Iranian regime miscalculated the impact in the Arab world of Egypt's rapprochement with Israel, it reinforced its cooperation with the latter. By the end of the seventies, Israel–Iran relations were so close in the military domain that the Israelis had become involved in a major project to modify advanced, surface-to-surface missiles for sale to Iran. Furthermore, documents leaked after the 1979 revolution by representatives of the new Islamic Republic revealed a major military program: project "Flower."

The project was part of a major oil-for-arms deal that was signed in April 1977 in Tehran by the Shah with Israel's Defense Minister, Shimon Peres. It involved the production of missiles with warheads weighing 750 kilograms that would be shipped through a Swiss company to Iran. The Israelis started testing a modified surface-to-surface missile whose range was to be extended and whose American-supplied parts were to be removed in order to export it without consultation with Washington. This was probably the most troubling element of the deal: the fact that the US government, which knew about most of the details of the Israeli–Iranian alliance, was kept in the dark regarding project Flower.[42] But according to leaked and declassified documents, this was only one of various programs both countries were developing. For instance, in July 1978, Israeli navy commander Admiral Michael Barkai met in Tehran with Admiral Habibollahi to discuss additional materials such as radar systems and systems to convert planes for maritime use.[43]

However, a few months later, as the Shah faced his demise, Iranian and Israeli officers who had been working closely for decades would be confronted with an unexpected regime change that brought the Islamic Republic of Ayatollah Khomeini. Could the Israeli periphery doctrine apply in spite of domestic changes in the allied countries? In Turkey, the military had toppled the government in 1960 and 1971 without the relation with Israel being jeopardized. In a last, and desperate, attempt to preserve its reach to Iran, Israel would try – and eventually fail – to accommodate the new leadership.

The Islamic revolution and the last Israeli attempts to preserve the ties

On February 1, 1979, two weeks after the Shah left Iran, the plane of Ayatollah Khomeini landed in Tehran. While getting rid of the remnants of the old regime, the new leader organized a referendum on April 1 that turned into a landslide victory. He then solemnly declared Iran an Islamic republic with a new Constitution. Khomeini was now the supreme spiritual leader according to the principle of *Wilayat al Faqih*.

This regime change took by surprise, both the Israelis and the Americans, who had been close supporters of the Shah. In an era where any collaborator with the previous regime was a target, the US and Israel had hardly any chance to engage publicly with the new leadership. Khomeini soon called the US the "Great Satan" and Israel "the little Satan."[44] According to Khomeini's writings, Israel was a Western invention transplanted in the Middle East. Back in the sixties, Khomeini was already condemning the Israel–Iran cooperation and directly accused the Shah on that issue.[45]

The concrete impact of Khomeini's revolution on foreign policy quickly materialized with his support of the storming of the US Embassy by Iranian students in November 1979. This episode marked the end of Iranian–American diplomatic relations and remains to this day a key event that shaped US policy toward Iran. But while the US–Iran cooperation was collapsing, the clandestine channel between Iranians and Israelis was maintained.

In fact, the Mossad was still operating in Iran but that did not mean Iran–Israel relations were intact. The slogan "Death to Israel" was a common one in the streets of Teheran during the 1979 revolution. At first, the Iranian Jewish community was not the target of Khomeini's followers as the cleric made a distinction between them and Zionism. Still, on February 11, 1979, ten days after Khomeini's return, the Iranian police joined the revolutionaries and shut down the Israeli mission in Teheran. A week later, in a highly symbolic gesture, the Islamic Republic welcomed its first foreign representative: Yasser Arafat, the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization. The offices used by the Israelis were swiftly transferred to the PLO while all Israelis were expelled from the country. The anti-Israeli rhetoric increased tremendously. On the last Friday of Ramadan 1979, Khomeini claimed:

> I have been notifying the Muslims of the danger posed by the usurper, Israel. I ask all the Muslims of the world and the Muslim governments to join together to sever the hand of this usurper and its supporters … and through a ceremony demonstrating the solidarity of Muslims worldwide, announce their support for the legitimate rights of the Muslim people.[46]

Persian translations of the infamous Protocols of the Elders of Zion were issued and the regime even sponsored an international, children's drawing and writing contest titled "Israel Must Be Erased from the Earth."[47] Numerous monuments

and murals were erected inside Iran to call for the annihilation of Israel while the Iranian delegation at the UN tried to expel Israel. A few months after coming to power, the Ayatollah ordered the execution of Habib Elghanian, head of the Tehran Jewish Society on charges of espionage, Zionism, and funding the Israeli Army.[48] Despite Elghanian's denials, he was executed, and other executions among the Jewish community were to follow.

In many ways, this anti-Zionist rhetoric had less to do with Iran–Israel relations than with Iran–Arab world relations, in particular as a war was looming between Iran and Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Through this campaign, Khomeini hoped to rally Arab countries that were looking suspiciously at the new power in Tehran. "We believed that our opposition against Israel would help convince the Islamic and Arab world that Iraq's attack on Iran was wrong," explained Mohebian a political editor for *Resalat*.[49] Trita Parsi reports that former Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Maleki told him "Iranian decision-makers were very clever to not substitute or replace Israel as a direct threat to Iran because at that time, Iraq was the threat."[50]

The anti-Zionist statements from Khomeini and other Iranian representatives failed to convince the Arab regimes, in particular the Gulf monarchies and Iraq, which feared the messianic ambitions of the Ayatollah. This explains why, as surprising as it may seem, the Islamic revolutionaries did not completely cease the exchanges with the Israelis. Mossad agents that had been responsible for the cooperation in the times of the Shah were still coming to Tehran, trying as much as possible to build ties with the new leadership. In fact, when the Iran–Iraq war erupted in 1980, Iranians secretly discussed the possibility of purchasing weapons from the Israelis.[51]

Later, as the war against Saddam's Iraq escalated, the Iranians faced scarcity in their weapon stockpiles. Although the Shah had bought a vast amount of American arms, the takeover of the US Embassy in Teheran led the US and most of the Western countries to impose economic sanctions on Iran. The arsenal the new regime found needed American-made spare parts and replacements. Meanwhile, the Israelis were rather enthusiastic about cooperating with the Iranian regime. In October 1980, Associated Press reported that Moshe Dayan – who had resigned from his position as Foreign Minister a year earlier – "does not believe Iran can win its war against Iraq without American help" and called for military support to Tehran. Two weeks later, Associated Press assessed that Israel is "rooting for Iran against Iraq in the Persian Gulf war because Iraq is a far more immediate enemy of Israel than Iran is."[52]

As a matter of fact, Saddam Hussein and his increasing arsenal of ballistic missiles and chemical weapons were perceived as a more significant threat to Israel than the young and disorganized Revolutionaries of Iran. Therefore, despite the aggressive anti-Zionist rhetoric in Tehran, the Israeli decision-makers believed that realpolitik and the imperatives of countering the Iraqi threat would prevail. In a way, they kept applying the same matrix of the periphery that called for balancing threats by allying with a third part.

In retrospect, their mistake might have been that Israeli representatives down-played the ideological dimension of the Islamic Revolution. But for a short while, it seemed as if they were right. During this period, the Iranian cleric, Ahmad Kashani, visited Israel to discuss arms sales and military cooperation. The development of Iraq's nuclear facility at Osirak was discussed, and it is said that the Iranian intelligence agency provided Israel with plans of the reactor to help prepare the Israeli air campaign against Osirak in September 1981.[53] By the end of that same year, American intelligence services estimated that Israel had sold "at least $28 million in equipment to Tehran."[54] When these exchanges were revealed in Washington, this produced major uproar in the White House, which considered such talks, after the storm of the US Embassy in Tehran, as a betrayal from the Begin government.

Nevertheless, the Americans soon followed the Israeli strategy along the Iran–Iraq war.[55] It was Amiram Nir, counterterrorism advisor to then Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, who played a major role to make the case to Oliver North at the US National Security Council. Nir convinced his American counterparts that selling weapons to the Iranians would fulfill three objectives: to balance Saddam Hussein's hegemonic ambitions; to maintain ties with the new regime in Tehran; and to find potential partners to rescue American hostages in Lebanon.[56]

This story became known as Irangate, a major scandal that compromised the Reagan administration. Starting in the summer 1985, the US sold arms to Iran. In exchange for these sales that helped the Iranian forces against Saddam Hussein's military, the White House expected to get Tehran's help in Lebanon where American hostages were held in custody by Shiite militias closely linked to the Iranian Revolutionary Guards.[57] The arms sales deliveries were channeled by two Israeli arms dealers, Yaacov Nimrodi – a former Israeli military attaché to Tehran – and Adolph Schwimmer – a founder of Israel Aircraft Industries and close friend of Shimon Peres. Their exchanges with Iranian broker Manucher Ghorbanifar were closely supervised by David Kimche, a former high-level operative at the Mossad who was Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.[58] Beyond the financial value of the sales, the Israelis probably hoped that these transactions would help to maintain a long-term channel of communication with the Iranians. But these expectations were soon disappointed not only by the public revelations of the sales but also by the new Iranian ambitions in the Levant, with the Iranian Revolutionary Guards being sent to Lebanon to fight against the Israeli forces.

On June 3, 1982, after a failed attempt to assassinate the Israeli Ambassador in London by a Palestinian group, Abu Nidal, operating in Lebanon, the Israeli military launched the operation "Peace in Galilea." The initial objective was to retaliate against the PLO in the south of the country but soon Ariel Sharon, then minister of defense, decided to move north, toward Beirut. In the south, the Israeli occupation was a traumatic experience for an impoverished and primarily Shia population.[59] In Teheran, the Israeli intervention was carefully monitored. Starting in the summer of 1982 and despite the protracted war Iran was already fighting against Iraq, Khomeini sent a contingent of 150 Revolutionary Guards to Lebanon. These latter were reporting directly to the Ayatollah and deployed to train and command Lebanese Shia militiamen in their struggle against Israelis

in the south. For the Iranian regime, the objective of their military involvement in Lebanon was twofold: to express solidarity with the Shia community there but also to export its political model in the heart of the Levant.[60] Khomeini's decision was a bold move. It opened a new front for the Iranians, who were already struggling to sustain the war effort against Saddam Hussein. But, additionally, it confirmed the fears in the Arab world regarding Khomeini's ambitions to spread the Islamic revolution into the region.

By the end of 1982, a rift appeared among the fighters of the main Shia–Lebanese movement Amal and a new faction emerged that would soon take the name of "Hezbollah" (Party of God). In the following years, Hezbollah would become one of the most critical security challenges Israel ever faced. In 2006, it would defy the IDF for 33 days in a war that, for the first time in Israel's history, ended without a decisive military result.[61]

If the long proxy war conducted by Iran through Hezbollah against Israel definitely meant the end of any engagement between the two sides, the nuclear file would grow in the nineties and the 2000s into the central issue for Israeli planners, becoming a matter of "existential threat." As soon as 1992, the Israeli government warned the Americans of the existence of an Iranian clandestine nuclear program.[62] According to the former UN inspector Scott Ritter, the revelations of the program made public in 2002 by the National Council of Resistance of Iran were in fact leaked to the group by Israeli intelligence services.[63]

Over the last two decades, the nuclear issue triggered numerous clandestine operations including the assassination of Iranian engineers, cyber attacks against Iranian nuclear plant of Natanz and rumors of an imminent airstrike. To evidence how much the Israeli security apparatus under the premiership of Benjamin Netanyahu, considered Iran a threat, it is worth looking at their security priorities in the conflict in neighboring Syria. While the US and its Western allies have considered the rise of the Islamic State starting in 2014 as the biggest challenge, the Israeli military perceived Iranian involvement and increasing military footprint on Syrian soil, in particularly on the Golan Heights, as a bigger concern. Some experts close to the Netanyahu government even suggested that the American administration was "using the grand threat of ISIS to legitimize Iran as a 'responsible' actor."[64] There has also been a feeling that the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action – commonly known as the Iranian nuclear deal signed with the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany and the European Union – emboldened Iran.[65]

While the nuclear deal of 2015 put a halt, at least temporarily, to the speculations over a preventive Israeli strike on the Iranian nuclear plants, the Syrian theater evidenced the complexities of the indirect conflict between Jerusalem and Tehran. If at first, the Iranian authorities mostly conveyed a message of political support to the regime of Bashar al Assad against rebel forces, their position evolved as the balance of forces on the ground appeared to challenge the stability of its Syrian ally. In the summer of 2012, after a suicide attack against a government building in Damascus killing several key representatives of Assad's security apparatus, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards deployed hundreds of

advisers to Syria. In addition to these men, the Lebanese Hezbollah – which had already been fighting in cross border conflicts with rebels – widened its footprint inside Syrian territory. The long band of land bordering Lebanon – from Quneitra to the Qalamoun mountains – increasingly became the theater of a war of attrition between Iranian forces and Syrian rebels, in particular the Al Qaeda off-shoot *Jabhat Al Nusra*. The clashes intensified in the following months: in April 2013, Hezbollah was to send more than 1200 men to the town of Al Qusayr where a major battle started, ending in a decisive breakthrough for the Party of God in June. Al Qusayr would be one of many other battles in the area. A year later, the town of Yabroud, not far away from Al Qusayr, flared up as well.

Given the intricate geography of the area, the Israeli forces deployed on the Golan Heights were closely observing the fighting on the other side of the border. The suspicion soon grew in Israeli military circles that the flow of Hezbollah and Iranian combatants did not solely aim to contain the conquest of Syrian rebels. By the end of 2014, theories of an Iranian build-up in the Golan to turn the area into a new forward base to target Israel emerged in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.[66] Israeli and Lebanese newspapers started to report signs that the Iranians had been building tunnels and bunkers, whose purpose was less to defeat *Jabhat Al Nusra* but to prepare for a future conflict with the Israeli military.[67]

Interestingly, the Israeli reaction to these developments echoed the principles of the periphery doctrine. Israeli forces started to discreetly exchange with Syrian rebels. Medical care was provided to Syrian civilians and rebels in Israeli bordering hospitals. Then, in December 2014, the United Nations Disengagement Observation Force based in the Golan witnessed surprising movements. In its December 2014 report, the observation force "sporadically observed armed members of the opposition interacting with [the] Israeli Defence Force across the ceasefire line in the vicinity of United Nations positions."[68]

The theory of a secret rapprochement between Israeli forces and the rebels surely served the conspiratorial narrative of the Syrian regime, but it also upset the Druze minority inside Israel, who considered groups like Jabhat Al Nusra a threat to their community in Syria. Consequently, Brigadier General Moti Almoz, a spokesman for the Israeli military, denied the allegation of any exchange with Jabhat Al Nusra.[69]

In addition to these developments, the Israeli military soon reacted to the Iran–Hezbollah strategy for the Golan with limited air strikes. Although Israeli raids in Syria had been frequent since 2011, they culminated in January 2015 when a helicopter bombed a Hezbollah convoy in the governorate of Quneitra. Seven militiamen died, among them Jihad Mughniyeh, the son of one of the founders of Hezbollah. More importantly, an Iranian brigadier general from the Revolutionary Guards, Mohammad Ali Allahdadi, died in the Israeli strike. Hezbollah launched a retaliatory attack on the Chebaa farms a week later, killing two soldiers and injuring seven others. Massive escalation was prevented but the standoff remained.

This latest illustration of Israel–Iran confrontation reflects not only how deep the enmity between the two countries has become but also how the Israelis kept applying the logic of the periphery, first with Iran and then against it. In the

Golan area and elsewhere, the Israeli strategy against Iran has been made of clandestine and *ad-hoc* cooperation with third parties like the Syrian rebels that balance Iranian strength. If the exchanges with Syrian insurgents were – in all likelihood – limited, they reflected the aim of the government in Jerusalem to adopt a pragmatic approach to balance the Iranian influence in the area. In other words, the movements witnessed by the UN forces between rebels and the IDF were a mere application of the periphery principle of external balancing. Moreover, the limited air strikes conducted by the Israeli Air Force did not intend to end the conflict but rather to preserve the status quo needed, in the Israeli perception, to ensure its stability. In Chapters 6 and 7, we will find again this rationale behind Israel's relations with countries like Azerbaijan and Saudi Arabia.

This tells us how much the approach is ingrained into the Israeli strategic culture. This may look like a paradox as the collapse of Iranian–Israeli relations could have announced the demise of the doctrine and its intellectual foundations. Although the partnership with Tehran was the most advanced one, it fell apart with the regime change in Iran. Nevertheless, the Israeli security apparatus would not challenge the matrix of its policies. In fact, it would keep applying it in other places, with other actors.

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5   Israel's errand in the remote areas of the periphery

Although Israel's engagement with Turkey and Iran was by far the most important parts of the periphery strategy, other initiatives took place during the same period. These attempts usually were of lesser strategic importance. They implied more modest military cooperation and were not perceived as pillars of Israel's national security policy like the relations with Tehran and Ankara were.

With regards to the American role, like in Turkey and Iran, the US government supported Israeli initiative toward countries such as Ethiopia. There were also Israeli–American exchanges on their rapprochement with the Lebanese Maronites and the Iraqi Kurds. But overall, this US involvement was rather limited, compared with the two biggest partnerships Israel had forged. Because Turkey and Iran played an important role in the Cold War's Middle East, Israel had clearly tailored its strategy to gain the attention from the US. In other places, the political and military elite of Washington were less concerned, although they would keep a watchful eye.

As explained at the beginning of this book, Ben-Gurion and the architects of the periphery did not conceive their strategy solely toward Turkey and Iran. These were to be the major branches of a multifaceted approach. It is therefore worth looking at some of the other most significant attempts by the Israeli decision-makers to build a regional network. This chapter details the cooperation between Israel and Ethiopia and we see how this partnership was meant not only as a gateway for Israel to the African continent but also as a way to balance Egypt. Then, we consider two Middle East minorities whose political leadership had been, at a certain point in history, entertaining a relation with Israel: the Christian Maronites in Lebanon, and the Kurds in Iraq. Again, the engagement with these minorities was driven by the objective of countering common enemies (in this case, the Palestinian Liberation Organization in Lebanon and the Iraqi regime).

Ethiopia and Israel's African engagement

Israel's interest in Africa was grounded in its foundation.[1] Theodore Herzl, the father of Zionism, had compared the fate of the Jewish people with the one of the black people. In his book *Altneuland*, published in 1902, Herzl wrote "once I have witnessed the redemption of the Jews, my people, I wish also to assist in the redemption of the Africans."[2] If the commonalities between modern Israel and the postcolonial African States were seen through the lens of shared identities, it was security interests rather than cultural ties that drove Israel into the continent.

Isolated by the Arab League, Israel saw the African States as potential partners to overcome its isolation. In 1955, it had been initially invited to participate in a conference of independent Asian and African states in Bandung, Indonesia, but quickly the invitation had been withdrawn by Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, because of Egyptian and Pakistani pressures.[3] Contacts were initiated with several countries but for many years, Ethiopia would be the closest African ally to Israel among others. The bilateral relations between Israel and Ethiopia were based on a series of common interests. Like the Israelis, Christian Ethiopians feared their Muslim populated neighbors. In his essay written in 1970, *David's Sling*, Shimon Peres depicts the relationship in an upbeat manner:

> There was something romantic in the relations between Israel and Ethiopia, though diplomacy and romance do not normally go together. It seemed that each country had a special feeling for the other. There were of course the stories of antiquity linking the two peoples. But apart from this, Ethiopia, to most of us in Israel, was a country of beauty and wonder, inhabited by a brave and talented people who had fought fanatically for their independence and sovereignty even against much mightier foes.[4]

Likewise, the Ethiopians liked to portray their relation to Israel as a personal one and the Solomonic lineage soon became a classic introduction of any bilateral talk. The Israeli Ambassador Abba Eban, who had been involved in the dialogue with Ethiopia, explained sarcastically that he "knows everything about the Queen of Sheba."[5] Indeed, both Ben-Gurion and Selassie referred to their ties as a legacy of the link between King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Selassie, the Ethiopian ruler, had had a long-time relation with the Zionists. The Yishuv had already established contacts with Ethiopia in the 1920s, and Haile Selassie was welcomed by the Jews of Jerusalem when he left Ethiopia in 1936 following the invasion of Mussolini's forces.

But despite the rhetoric of shared identities, Ethiopia was one of the last non-Muslim states to recognize Israel. Normalization occurred in 1956 – several years after countries like Turkey and Iran. Contrary to these two latter countries, Ethiopia established *de jure* relations at the end of 1961.[6] Romantic images of King Solomon and Queen Sheba were not in the end what triggered the rapprochement.

In 1956, the Israelis were allowed to open a consulate general in Addis Ababa while the Ethiopian consulate general in Jerusalem functioned as the reciprocal part. Israeli decision-makers had the ambitions to engage equally with Sudan to build a southern periphery composed of Ethiopia and Sudan in a similar fashion as the alliance being developed with Turkey and Iran.[7] However, this never materialized, as no trilateral meeting ever occurred between Sudanese, Israelis, and Ethiopians. This became an unlikely development after the coup d'état in Sudan in 1958 which put an end to the ties between Khartoum and Jerusalem.[8]

For the Israelis, the first years of the bilateral relation with Ethiopia were a disappointment. By 1958, the bilateral relation had not proved as important as earlier planned by Israeli diplomats. A memorandum from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated on November 5, 1958:

> Despite promises made in the past, diplomatic relations between Israel and Ethiopia have not yet been established, contacts are at the level of the consulate-general. They agree that Israel must be strengthened, but refrain from stating this publicly. They complain that Israel is not investing sufficient funds in the area of agriculture and industry. Israeli representatives generally encounter a definite attitude of reservation at the Ethiopian Foreign Ministry, but on the other hand the attitude of the military personnel is more favorable.[9]

Interestingly, we see here again similarities with the Turkish and Iranian cases: in Addis Abeba, civilians and politicians refrained from enhancing the partnership while security forces were keen on gaining experience from their Israeli counterpart. Additionally, like in Ankara and Tehran, the rapprochement with Israel would not be triggered because of a deep cultural bond but rather out of fears of Nasser's pan-Arab ambitions.

On November 16, 1958, Reuven Shiloah travelled to Addis Ababa for a working visit. There, he met with the American Ambassador to Ethiopia, Satterthwaite, who conveyed the support from Washington on Israel's initiative. Based on the account of the talks in Israel's diplomatic archives, it seems that the exchanges between American and Ethiopian authorities during that period did include the rapprochement with Israel.[10] Interestingly, when Shiloah met that same day the prime minister of Ethiopia, the focus of their exchanges was the coup in Sudan and the fear that "the country would fall into the hands of Nasser."[11] Haile Selassie, the leader of Ethiopia, did fear Nasser's hegemonic ambitions, comparing the Egyptian ruler to Ahmad Gragn, the General of the Adal Sultanate who occupied the territory of modern Ethiopia in the sixteenth century.[12] Three areas of potential influence for Nasser were feared by Selassie: Somalia, Eritrea, and Ethiopia itself.

As a result, the Israelis clearly designed their strategy with the Ethiopians on the argument of countering Egypt. In July 1959, Hannan Bar-On wrote a cable from Addis Ababa to prepare the forthcoming visit of Foreign Minister Golda Meir to meet the Emperor Selassie. Hannan Bar-On the Israeli representative in

Addis Ababa was a Mossad agent who previously worked as head of the Shin Beth, Israel's domestic intelligence agency, in Jerusalem. Bar-On would serve the first two years as both consul and head of the Mossad station. In his cable to Meir, Bar-On suggested putting the "periphery" argument at the core of the talks:

> The periphery argument should be raised again, emphasizing strengthened ties between the countries of the periphery. The problem of Sudan should be raised, and the emperor asked about his plans for strengthening Sudan's independence. Israel should offer assistance, especially in the international arena.[13]

Bar-On also recommended channeling Ethiopian demands to the Americans through an "Israeli intervention at the US State Department and Congress." Finally, he raised the issue of Ethiopian recognition, *de jure*, of Israel – which was not yet achieved at that time: "it should be explained to the emperor that recognition would be seen as a courageous and wise step that would stress the desire to continue practical cooperation."[14]

Ben-Gurion was also conveying the message to his European partners, in particular French President de Gaulle, that supporting Ethiopia was crucial to counter Nasser's hegemonic ambitions. In a letter addressed to de Gaulle in July 1958, Ben-Gurion wrote:

> Independent Ethiopia will be undermined, because Nasser is already meddling in Eritrea, Djibouti and in British and Ethiopian Somalia, and he does so relying on a nucleus of Muslims inside of Ethiopia itself. Facing the dangers in these developments, we have tried to reinforce our ties with four neighboring countries on the periphery of the Middle East: Iran, Ethiopia, Turkey, and Sudan.[15]

The Ben-Gurion message to de Gaulle was a detailed explanation of the periphery doctrine. Noticeably, it was very similar to the one he sent at the same time to Eisenhower. Later in the letter, the Israeli Prime Minister specifies some objectives such as "to provide these countries with the effective means to counter internal subversion," "to help them build efficient intelligent services." He also suggested that France could be "of great help and become an important factor in this arrangement." The depiction of Israel's perception by Ethiopian leadership was extremely upbeat, obviously too much so: "The leaders of the three countries have full trust in us, our efficiency and our loyalty."[16]

Despite Israeli expectations, Ethiopia still refrained from recognition "because of the fear of the reaction of Sudan."[17] Furthermore, Bar-On described the bureaucratic inertia in the Ethiopian foreign ministry as an additional impediment to implement any significant change in the diplomatic relations.[18] Starting in 1957–1958, Israel sent several delegations to assess the areas of cooperation. Among the officials that visited Addis Ababa were the heads of the Shin Beth, the head of the Mossad, Isser Harel, the commander of military intelligence, General Yehoshafat Harkabi and his deputy, Professor Yuval Ne'eman. Soon, like in other

periphery allies, the Mossad became the leading agency with Nahum Admoni in charge of the bilateral relation. The Ethiopian internal services received expertise and training from numerous agents traveling from Jerusalem: Adi Sela from the Israeli Police, Ehud Rapaport and Eliezer Zafrir from the Shin Beth.[19]

Although the military cooperation was not as significant as the one with the Turks and the Iranians, there were some rather ambitious projects. At the beginning, the Israeli military intelligence discussed with its Ethiopian counterparts the project of building a common intelligence base in Asmara, specifically targeting Egypt. With the armed forces, the Israelis provided training for the nascent Ethiopian paratroop force. They offered assistance in defense planning and counterinsurgency techniques. According to various reports, the military cooperation was excellent and closely monitored by political leaders. Lieutenant Colonel Eli Zeira, who headed the military mission in Addis Ababa, wrote:

> There was no limit to my audacity […] to my surprise, whatever I initiated was well responded to by both the Ethiopian and the Israeli sides. Time and again, Warqnah Gabayhu [Head of the general security services] and Mengistu Neway [Commander of the Ethiopian Imperial Guard] summoned me to the Emperor.[20]

Haile Selassie and his Prime Minister, Aklilu, did not travel to Israel out of concern for the message it would convey to Arab neighbors. In fact, mostly working-level delegations were secretly sent. High-level military officials did visit Israel: in June 1963, a delegation headed by Ministry of Defense Iyasu Mangasha included the commanders of Ethiopia's air force, ground forces and navy. For the most part, Israel's Ethiopia policy was made by the IDF and the Mossad. As the Israeli representative in Addis Ababa was sent by the Mossad, the intelligence community had built a significant knowledge and network that the ministry of foreign affairs lacked. Moreover, the most proactive actors on the Ethiopian side were the intelligence agency and the military.

The major difference with Ethiopia compared with Turkey and Iran was that the Israeli cooperation mostly circled around building the capabilities of the Ethiopian forces. The state of readiness of the armed forces was so low that objectives like intelligence sharing or joint planning were quickly put aside. As the Israeli military mission in Ethiopia described in 1964:

> Our activity is intended to advance the Ethiopians toward independence in the areas where we help them: a staff school; a commando course for officers; a course for intelligence officers; training courses for commanders in all divisions; military intelligence on all levels, and throughout the system, training and advising; advanced infantry training in all divisions, training a marine unit in the navy; special projects and supplies for the air force.[21]

The lengthy description reflects how much the Ethiopian military relied on the Israelis to build their forces. Sometimes, the poor quality of the trainees was

the object of reports of complaints by the trainers. The Israeli police mission wrote "the problems we encountered were utter inefficiency of the upper police command and its disinterest in daily police work."[22]

Ethiopia's cautious rapprochement with Israel was first challenged as a result of the six-day war in 1967. The following occupation of Egyptian Sinai and the Arab denunciations of Israel's colonial ambitions severely tarnished the image of the State in Africa. In international fora such as the UN General Assembly, Ethiopia did follow this trend and sided with the Arab condemnations of Israeli occupation. At the same time, secret bilateral cooperation actually grew larger. This paradoxical situation was clearly depicted in 1970 by Uri Lubrani, Israeli Ambassador to Ethiopia, when he wrote "we have to continue to protest against Ethiopia's voting record at the UN, but at the same time continue striving for an alliance in the fields of security and political coordination."[23] The same year, Shimon Peres wrote – as he was a member of the Golda Meir government, that "the development of military force cannot be divorced from comprehensive economic and social development."[24] Although Peres saw military cooperation as essential to the relation with Ethiopia, he thought that both countries should broaden its scope, and that a strong Ethiopian economy was eventually in Israel's interest.

Although the cooperation seemed more constructive and less challenging than the one with Turkey and Iran, Haile Selassie was hesitating regarding the issue regularly raised of going public about the bilateral relations. Eventually, the project was ruled out. Furthermore, the seventies started with a deterioration of the situation in Eritrea, urging Selassie to look for partners in the Arab world. Libya, Sudan, and Egypt all rejected the Ethiopian ruler because of his ties with Israel. As a result, Selassie chose to rebalance his partnerships and lower the level of cooperation with Israel. Nasser's death in September 1970 and his replacement by Sadat opened a window of opportunity for the warming-up of Egyptian-Ethiopian relations. Improved relations with other Arab regimes like Sudan and Saudi Arabia further evidenced the progressive shift in Ethiopia's Middle East policy. This was confirmed after the October 1973 war, when the diplomatic relations with Israel were concretely severed. Additionally, the decline and death of Haile Selassie a year later amplified the revision of Ethiopia's position. The oil embargo proclaimed by Arab regimes dramatically affected Ethiopian economy.

After the death of Selassie, the Mossad still maintained its office in Addis Abeba, but the bilateral cooperation was significantly downgraded. The new ruler, Mengistu, who led the military junta that took power in 1974, would prove a brutal dictator responsible for the "Red Terror," a massive campaign of targeted assassinations of his opponents. As a result, by the end of the seventies, fearing that his presence was becoming perilous, the Israeli intelligence representative in Addis Ababa asked his headquarters to send him back to Israel.[25]

This marked the end of Israel–Ethiopia partnership. Like the Israelis witnessed in Iran, relations with Ethiopia relied primarily on the initiative of the highest-level officials such as Selassie and his close circle. Because normalization never succeeded, no bureaucratic routine was put in place and the whole

cooperation was to be challenged by a regime change. Moreover, as seen with Iran and Turkey, the threat balancing element was so central in the relation with Ethiopia that any change in the ties between Addis Ababa and the Arab world would jeopardize the whole Israeli strategy.

Israel's relations with the Lebanese Christian forces

Contrary to the mainstream perception, the Arab world is a mosaic of numerous religious and ethnic communities whose acceptance of the Arab regimes determines the stability of social fabric in some countries of the region, such as Lebanon, Syria or Iraq. Fully aware of this fact, the Zionist founders, starting in the 1920s, worked toward building a network within the Arab world with political leaders from ethnic or religious minorities that would be inclined to talk to the Zionists. This was, for instance, the purpose of Reuven Shiloah's travels to Kurdistan during that period.

One of the minorities that worked closely with the early Zionists was the Lebanese Christian leadership. Like the builders of modern Israel, the Maronite clergy in Lebanon feared that its community would be endangered in the emerging Middle East and considered that an alliance with other non-Muslim minorities could prevent any oppression.[26] As a result, first contacts between the Lebanese Christians and Jews in Palestine were made in March 1920 with a cooperation pact established by Yehoshua Hankin from the Zionist Organization and Najib Sfeir, Rashid Karami and Yusuf Mu'azzin on the Lebanese side. Sfeir expanded his exchanges to economic cooperation with Moshe Shertok, later to be known as Moshe Sharett, who was at that time working in the Political Department of the Jewish Agency. This was followed in the early thirties by Haim Arlossoroff, political director of the Jewish Agency. One of Arlossoroff's advisors, Victor Jacobson, travelled to Syria and Lebanon in 1933 to seek potential allies. In Beirut, he was warmly welcomed by the "Young Phoenicians," a group that claimed its aim to restore the historical ties between the Phoenicians and King Solomon.[27] Later, in 1936, during a meeting between Lebanese President Emile Eddé and Eliahu Epstein taking place in Beirut on September 22, 1936, Eddé declared:

> The Jews and the Maronites are natural partners because of their similar situation. Jewish and Lebanese cultures were both superior to that of the Arab neighbours and both were struggling for the same goal – to build a constructive bridge between Eastern and Western culture. They also had a common neighbour in the East with aggressive intentions.[28]

Again, if the rhetoric of shared identities was salient, it was the perception of a common threat – the Sunni Arab majority in the region – that triggered the rapprochement. Eventually, two years before the proclamation of Israel, a formal agreement was concluded on May 30, 1946 between Eliahu Sasson, the head of the Jewish Agency's Arab Department and Tewfic Awad representative of the

Maronite Church. However, the Patriarchate insisted on keeping the agreement secret and as a result, it remained a modest attempt to engage with a neighboring non-Muslim community. During this period, local media outlets depicted the Lebanese identity in that perspective: "Lebanon has a character and interests of its own, and it has a not unimportant role to play in this part of the world, forming like the Jews in Palestine, a link between the West and the Orient."[29] On the other side, Ben-Gurion saw Lebanon as a "natural ally." In 1954, he wrote to Prime Minister Moshe Sharett that "Lebanon is the weakest link in the Arab League."[30] Ben-Gurion believed that not only there was a historical basis for a Christian State in the Middle East but that it would be Israel's interest to support this State. This assessment derived not only from cold calculus but also from the perception of a shared identity as a minority in the Arab world.

Till this day, this belief remains salient, in particular inside Israel's ministry of foreign affairs. One diplomat told the author in Jerusalem:

> we feel very close to the Lebanese because there is proximity at the cultural level and eventually this will pave the way for normalization. Of all our neighbors, Lebanon is the one with which we feel there should be a natural relation.[31]

Nevertheless, history tends to weaken this optimism. Not only was Lebanon torn apart by two civil wars in the fifties and seventies, but the Maronite leadership proved not to be a reliable partner. Sectarian tensions in Lebanon were exacerbated when in 1971 the PLO moved to the south of the country, bordering Israel, to establish its operating base. As a result, the Israeli Commander of the Northern Command Mordechai Gur repeatedly met the Commander of Lebanese Troops in South Lebanon, Saad Haddad to discuss the matter. Gur repeatedly called on Haddad to tame the Palestinians as they were launching terrorist operations in Israel from Lebanon but Haddad put the blame on the absence of a robust central authority in Beirut. When the civil war sparked in Lebanon in 1975, the Maronite *Kataeb* (phalanx) turned more and more to the Israelis for external support. The Maronites felt Yasser Arafat's PLO was endangering Lebanon's social and political stability by dragging the country into a protracted insurgency against the Israelis. Facing growing defiance from Sunni and Shia communities, the ruling Christians saw the Palestinian issue as an exacerbating factor of the upheaval.

There was an understanding between both the Israelis and the Christian Lebanese that they faced a common enemy with the PLO. Israel was keen on providing support to the Christians in Lebanon as long as these latter would be able to stabilize the country. Limited military aid was therefore offered according to a policy of "helping the Maronites to help themselves."[32] At the same time, Pierre Gemayel, the founder of the Kataeb, maintained a rather ambivalent position vis-à-vis the relations with Israel. He did understand that public exchanges would undermine the image of the Kataeb in the Arab public opinion, but he acknowledged the need for allies that could help the Christians in the battles. In contrast, his son Bashir appeared as a strong advocate of an alliance

with Israel, stating publicly that "Lebanon must go hand in hand with Israel, because the two countries find themselves in the same situation and both loathe the Arab world."[33] However, Israeli intelligence officers who first met Bashir deemed him not trustworthy.[34] The Gemayel, both father and son, were inconsistent in their statements, in particular regarding Syria's intervention that started in 1975.

Other contacts were maintained: starting in August 1976, former Lebanese President Camille Chamoun met several times with Israeli Prime Minister Rabin on an Israeli navy ship. Arms were supplied to Christian forces: rifles, anti-tank missiles as well as Sherman tanks.[35] As the transfer of weaponry increased, the IDF replaced the Mossad as the leading agency, although David Kimche – a key figure from the Mossad who would play a decisive role in the Irangate – remained the architect of Israel's Lebanon policy.[36]

The increased ties between the Maronites and Israel in the midst of the Lebanese civil war engendered anger in the Shia community, which considered itself oppressed by the Christian leadership. It is sometimes forgotten that Israel had also tried to engage with Lebanese Shi'ites back in the fifties, sixties, and early seventies. Following the periphery logic of siding with Middle East minorities, Israel supplied arms through Iranian intermediaries who coordinated with the five leading Shi'ite families in the South.[37] This was before the Shi'ite community started to organize itself at the political level through the leadership of Musa Sadr, the founder of Amal, in the seventies. The rapprochement between Israel and the Maronites would eventually prevail over other attempts. Moreover, Israel's ill-fated invasion of Lebanon in June 1982 would definitely antagonize the impoverished Shi'ite population of the south.

As we saw in the chapter on Israel–Iran relations, the trigger for Israel's Lebanon war was the failed assassination of Israel's Ambassador to Great Britain, Shlomo Argov, by a Lebanon-based Palestinian group Abu Nidal. The response designed by Israel Minister of Defense, Ariel Sharon, was Operation "Peace for Galilee." The Israeli invasion was supported by Bashir Gemayel who called it a "surgical operation."[38] The swift military success in the south led Sharon to expand upon the initial objectives and to move to the capital, Beirut, and to induce the Lebanese authorities to sign a peace treaty.

On September 1, following the election of Bashir Gemayel as the new president of Lebanon, Prime Minister Begin met with him and Major Saad Haddad. Haddad was the first officer who had defected from the Lebanese Army in 1975 to become the leader of the Christian Lebanese Forces in southern Lebanon which had been trained and armed by the IDF. The meeting took place in the Israeli northern city of Nahariya. Begin hoped to find in Gemayel a leader able to balance the political and military power of the PLO in Lebanon. Gemayel postponed its signature but at least suggested a pact of non-aggression. Again, the Israeli dream of normalization was adjourned. While Begin and his staff showed disappointment for Gemayel's leadership, the latter also conveyed discontent regarding the way Begin treated him. American sources told the Medias that "Bashir came after the meeting with Begin and Haddad and said Begin treated him like a bell boy. He said he was very humiliated."[39]

Gemayel was killed in a bombing attack on September 14. To this day, theories on the Gemayel assassination still circulate in the Middle East: in particular, some believe it was the Syrian regime that wanted to get rid of a Lebanese President that may normalize relations with Israel. The death of the newly elected President plunged Lebanon into another cycle of violence. In the following days, the Kataeb waged an assault on the Palestinian camps of Sabra and Chatila. The Israeli military controlling the area observed the slaughter of Palestinian civilians by Christian militiamen but did not report the crimes. Soon, the Israeli leadership realized Kataeb fighters were indiscriminately killing the population, and General Amos Yaron ordered them to evacuate the camp but that order came too late. The massacre of Sabra and Chatila triggered international uproar. In Israel, the indirect involvement of its troops in such a crime provoked major outrage in the public opinion. In early 1983 the Kahane Commission confirmed the guilt of Lebanese Christian militias and the indirect responsibility of Israel's Defense Minister, Ariel Sharon. It marked the end of the Maronite–Israeli secret alliance. Following the massacre of Sabra and Chatila, Israeli government distanced itself from the Kataeb.

In the end, Israel's relation with the Kataeb leadership proved catastrophic for several reasons. First, the Israeli intelligence overestimated the political capital of the Gemayel camp in the context of the Lebanese civil war. The Mossad and the IDF took at face value the pledges from the Kataeb to restore stability in Lebanon, when they were in fact escalating the sectarian conflict. Amos Gilad, a Major General and Director for Political Affairs at the Israeli Ministry of Defense bluntly, said in retrospect, "We linked up with a non-existent partner … a gang of lowly charlatans that deceived us into thinking it was possible to bring about a 'new order' in the Middle East."[40]

Gilad's analysis reveals the psychological dimension of the relation between the Maronites and the Israelis. If the latter saw the former prior to the civil war in Lebanon as brave leaders of a small community eager to make peace with the Jewish State, they were now perceived as dangerous militiamen who pulled Israel into their sectarian conflicts.[41] More than a year after Sabra and Chatila, Amin Gemayel – brother of Bashir – travelled to Damascus and made to effect the shift of the Maronites from Israel toward the Assad regime in Syria. As a result, the Israeli mission in Lebanon was soon shut down, leaving only small IDF units in the self-declared security zone in the south supporting the Israeli–sponsored South Lebanon Army.

Maybe the worst effect of Israel's partnership with the Kataeb was that the former got dragged into the military campaign of the latter, with the slaughters of Sabra and Chatila being the ultimate and infamous culmination of that phenomenon. This tarnished Israel's worldwide reputation but more importantly, it damaged till today its perception inside Lebanon. More broadly, the case of the Israeli–Maronite relations also reveals the inherent risk of such alliances: through this rapprochement, the Israelis became at the mercy of the Lebanese perilous policies.[42]

Israel–Kurdish cooperation

Although Israel's partnership with the Lebanese Christians is well known and documented, it is sometimes ignored that another minority built significant ties with the Jewish State: the Kurdish community. As a matter of fact, the Kurdish project has itself been usually portrayed by Arab rulers as a "second Israel" and Kurdistan has been derided as a new "Yahudistan" (literally "land of the Jews").[43] For sure there are some commonalities in the national narratives of both communities in terms of persecutions and self-emancipation.

The first exchanges between Israel's founders and Kurdish leaders took place before the Second World War. More particularly, Iraqi Kurds engaged in exchanges with the Zionists. As mentioned earlier, Reuven Shiloah travelled to the Kurdish region in Iraq back in the thirties and clearly saw the Kurds as potential allies in his periphery strategy. Political and military ties then emerged in the late fifties.

From the outset, the Israelis limited their engagement to the Kurds of Iraq. Following the logic of the periphery – rather than a positive feeling for the ideas of national aspiration of the Kurds – Israel saw the Kurds of Iraq as an asset against the leadership of Baghdad whereas Kurds in Turkey or Iran could undermine regimes closed to Israel.[44] Even if Israelis perceived positively the Kurdish project, they were wary of endangering the relation with Turkey through this support. From that perspective, Israel did not make the mistake with the Kurds of getting dragged into their own power plays. As a result, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) was clearly denounced by Israeli authorities as a terrorist organization. Not only was the PKK an enemy of Israel's Turkish ally, but it was supported by Israel's own enemy, the Syrian regime of Hafez al Assad. Starting in 1979, the latter granted asylum to Abdullah Öcalan, leader of the PKK. The Kurdish organization was involved in Lebanon during the civil war alongside the PLO and it has been reported that they directly engaged in fighting with Israeli forces.[45] In May 1997, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made the point very clear: "Turkey suffers from the PKK terrorist attacks, and we see no difference whatsoever between the PKK terrorism and the terrorism faced by Israel."[46]

With regards to the Iraqi Kurds, Israel's rapprochement occurred in the same regional context as the one with Turkey and Iran. A report on a meeting of the senior staff of the ministry of foreign affairs, dated September 11, 1958, mentions talks between Maurice Fischer, Israeli Ambassador to Turkey, and Kurdish leader, Kamuran Ali Badir Khan, "to reduce the Nasserist influence among the Kurds."[47] The exchanges grew in earnest after the Kurdish rebellion in Iraq in 1961. When the relation between Kurdish leader Mulla Mustafa Barzani and the Iraqi regime deteriorated, the Iranians and Israelis agreed to support jointly the Kurdish efforts to launch a guerrilla against the Iraqi military. Ironically, the Iranians were playing the Kurdish card against Iraq the same way Baghdad had done in the past against Tehran. Earlier, Barzani had aligned his forces with the regime of Abd al-Karim Qasim, allowing the

Kurdish factions to launch attacks on Iran, but this marriage of convenience between the Kurds and the Iraqi regime dissolved rapidly.

On the Kurdish side, Ismet Sherif Banly, a close adviser to the leader Mustafa Barzani, recommended the cooperation and visited Israel on several occasions to discuss the framework with Prime Minister Levi Eshkol.[48] In 1963, Israel started sending military advisors to Barzani and by August 1965, Kurdish officers were receiving training courses by Israeli instructors in the Kurdistan Mountains.[49] A charismatic leader, Mulla Mustafa Barzani would be the central figure of the Iraqi Kurdish movement for more than three decades. He played a significant role in the building of a national identity of Iraqi Kurds that obviously went against the Arab identity defended by the regime in Baghdad.[50] Facilitated by the Iranians, the relation between Israel and Barzani grew bigger, and the Kurdish leader visited the country twice (in 1967 and 1973). Other figures of the Kurdish movements such as Barzani's sons, Masoud and Idris, and Aziz Aqrawi, travelled to Israel. But overall, Mulla Mustafa Barzani was the central figure in the Israeli–Kurdish relation. Later, witnessing the personal nature of these ties, the death of Barzani in 1979 would lead the Mossad to hold a memorial service.[51]

All along, the Iranian leadership would remain extremely cautious about the support provided to the Kurds, fearing that such action could backfire at home. Iranian intelligence officers would always monitor Israeli–Kurdish cooperation and report its full details to Tehran.[52] These activities were again known by the US intelligence as evidenced by declassified memoranda of that period.[53] On the other side, numerous Israeli officials visited the Iraqi Kurdish region. Although these exchanges were kept secret, rumors of Israelis being active in Northern Iraq fueled many conspiracy theories. The Israelis perceived the Baath Party that seized power in Baghdad in 1963 as its biggest security challenge – especially after the decline of Nasser's Egypt starting in 1967. Therefore, the relation with the Kurds played a major role in terms of intelligence sharing on the Iraqi regime. The intelligence services of the Kurdish Democratic Party, the so-called Parastin, were built partly thanks to the support of the Mossad.[54] The partnership also facilitated the support to the thousands of Jews fleeing Iraq. In exchange, the Israelis supplied security and humanitarian aid to the Kurds. In the military domain, the aid included small arms and ammunition, but later it also added antitank and antiaircraft weapons.

The logic of Israeli and Iranian support to the Iraqi Kurds was the following one: Barzani's forces would harass the Iraqi army in such a way that Baghdad would not be able to focus its troops on foreign fronts. In other words, Israel helped the Iraqi Kurds to "continue to cause problems" to its enemy in Baghdad.[55] After the 1973 war, Israel sent, through Iran, Soviet hardware captured from the Egyptians to the Kurds.[56]

The partnership came to a halt in March 1975, following the Algiers Pact between Iran and Iraq. The Shah withdrew his support for the Kurdish rebellion, which collapsed. As a result, Israel lost its access to Iraqi Kurdistan through Iran.[57] Moreover, Israelis claimed the US government urged them to stop their cooperation with the Kurds as Washington feared it would jeopardize the new Iranian–Iraqi relations.[58]

These ties were acknowledged for the first time by Prime Minister Menachem Begin on September 29, 1980 when he confirmed on Radio Israel that Israel had supported the Kurds "during their uprising against the Iraqis in 1965–1975."[59] It has also being reported that the Israelis facilitated Kurdish–American exchanges, in particular thanks to their close relations with the US Congress. The Iraqi regime did know about the developments in the Israeli–Kurdish relations and it fit into Saddam Hussein's mainstream narrative of a conspiracy led by the Americans, backed by the Israelis, and the Iranians to topple the regime in Iraq. In 1975, a declassified report from the US intelligence community stated "the Iraqis probably believe that the US was collaborating with Iran – and Israel – in providing military assistance to the Kurds."[60]

It is only after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, that relations between Israel and Iraqi Kurds resurfaced. In June 2004, the American journalist Seymour Hersh asserted in *The New Yorker* that the Israeli–Kurdish relation after 2003 was meant to prevent the chaos foreseen in Iraq:

> Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's government decided, I was told, to minimize the damage that the war was causing to Israel's strategic position by expanding its long-standing relationship with Iraq's Kurds and establishing a significant presence on the ground in the semi-autonomous region of Kurdistan.[61]

It is said that the Israelis supplied Erbil with "tons of equipment, including motorcycles, tractors, sniffer dogs, systems to upgrade Kalashnikov rifles, bulletproof vests, and first-aid items."[62] The Kurdish government also selected Israeli companies to provide its security forces with advanced communications equipment. As a matter of fact, several meetings were arranged between Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Kurdish leaders such as Masud Barzani and Jalal Talabani. Moreover, the Peshmerga forces received training from Israeli advisors.[63]

In 2005, Barzani declared publicly that "establishing relations between the Kurds and Israel is not a crime since many Arab countries have ties with the Jewish state."[64] In 2008, Jalal Talabani, Iraqi President by then, shook hands publicly with the Israeli defense minister, Ehud Barak, at a conference in Greece. Such a gesture coming from the leader of a country that does not officially recognize Israel was a remarkable evidence of how the relation had evolved from its secret beginning. Additionally, there have been reports that in 2009 a publication titled *Israel–Kurd* appeared in Kurdistan and promoted close relations between the two communities.[65]

Although the result of Israeli engagement with Kurdish forces was not as catastrophic as the one with Christian Lebanese factions, it was also far more modest. Like in the case of other members of the periphery, the cooperation focused on building a credible security partner rather than exchanging with it. Moreover, all along, there seemed to remain a strong environment of suspicion, if not distrust, between the two sides. Israeli trainers have shared mixed experiences on their contacts with Kurdish forces. They sometimes pointed out the fact

that Kurds were not reliable partners contrary to the major expectations expressed back in Jerusalem.[66]

The idea that the Kurds would harass the regime in Baghdad to help weaken an enemy of Israel also proved questionable. Although some commentators believe that Iraq sent limited forces to fight against Israel during the 1967 Six-Day War because of the Kurdish attacks on its military, this theory is contested by historians who argue that Barzani's forces were barely active against the Iraqi regime during this specific period. Likewise, Israeli expectations to see the Kurds opening a front in Iraq during the 1973 war turned out to be wrong assumptions.[67]

In her monograph on the Kurds of Iraq, Tel Aviv-based scholar Ofra Bengio argues that the Israeli support to the Iraqi Kurds went beyond the periphery strategy and was grounded in Israeli empathy for the Kurdish cause. Using a declassified report from the Mossad, Bengio underlined that "the personal connections between Mossad representatives, who witnessed Kurdish suffering and bereavement, and the Kurds had a profound effect."[68]

It could also be argued that the Israeli–Kurdish partnership was limited because of the enduring fragmentation of Kurdish forces themselves. If the Kataeb proved a disastrous partner for Israel, it was still a robust representative of one Middle Eastern minority. The Kurds in Syria, Iraq, and Iran have divergent interests and conflicting security strategies, which made their policies with external actors extremely difficult.[69] Against that backdrop, there is, as of today, no rationale for upgrading the relationship with Israel.

All in all, this account of Israel's historical peripheral allies evidences the difficulties decision-makers in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv faced to establish enduring ties with countries or non-state actors that, in all cases, were cautious not to commit themselves to full recognition of Israel. As a logical consequence, Israel failed to turn the policy into a regional alliance and it remained, at best, a collection of bilateral partnerships. The history of the periphery strategy also reflects the constraints of geopolitical contingencies. Regime changes sometimes triggered cooperation – like the Iraqi coup of 1958 – but for the most part they led to a suspension of the clandestine ties (Ethiopia, Iran, and Turkey).

Additionally, because Israel and its partners altogether tried to avoid getting trapped in the rivalries of the other sides, commitment to the alliance remained limited and typical elements of such framework, like solidarity clauses, were out of the question. Consequently, normalization was never achieved in any of these cases, and endurance of the partnerships was regularly challenged by the pressure from Arab neighbors. More importantly, the engagement with the periphery never decreased the Israeli perception of being isolated and having to cope by itself with neighboring hostility. All in all, this calls for a rather negative appraisal of the periphery's achievements. The regime changes in Ethiopia and Iran logically pushed the strategy to the background of Israel's foreign policy agenda. Still, as we see in the next part of this book, that did not signify the death of the concept. Instead, it would evolve with a new list of potential members while its fundamental logic remained the same.

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Part III

Change and continuity in the periphery approach

By the year 2010, the periphery doctrine had become a mere relic of the Cold War era used by scholars and retired practitioners to discuss the Ben-Gurion grand strategy of the late fifties. The security environment appeared quite different from the years when Shiloah and Uziel had designed the periphery. Pan-Arabism had vanished decades ago, when Egyptian President Anwar el Sadat had signed the peace treaty and recognized Israel in 1979. Hostile Arab regimes like Syria and Iraq were on the verge of facing internal uprisings that made them weak competitors. Quite ironically, Israel's contemporary threats and challenges were originating from its past allies: Iran and Turkey.

By then, Iran had turned into an "existential threat" in the Israeli security establishment, in particularly because of its nuclear ambitions, which had become one of the most critical issues for Israeli prime ministers.[1] Meanwhile, Turkey, under the rule of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, distanced itself from Israel and invested into closer relations with the Arab world and was therefore eyed with suspicion and a bitter feeling of betrayal by the Israelis.

Against that backdrop, the following years would see a resurrection of the periphery concept. In December 2010, Yossi Alpher, a former Mossad official, used the expression "periphery thinking" to portray Israel's troubles with Turkey.[2] In other words, the mindset that shaped the strategy in the fifties was still salient. Local newspapers (*Haaretz*, *Jerusalem Post*, and *Times of Israel*) and think tanks (INSS, Begin-Sadat Center) unearthed the concept and started discussing its content. Soon the debate was not about debunking an approach – which, after all, had not borne fruit – but rather about its revision. This led to what Yoel Guzansky called "Israel's Periphery Doctrine 2.0."[3] The list of allies had changed – they were now Greece or Azerbaijan, although others were added from time to time – but the fundamental philosophy remained the same. Israeli policymakers were again shaping their regional partnerships through the lens of a zero-sum game where new alliances would balance potential threats.

In that perspective, this third and last part of our book explores the changes and the elements of continuity in the periphery approach. In social sciences, theories, concepts, and paradigms must constantly be tested against their evolving empirical environment.[4] Changes bring about challenges that check the

enduring relevance of ideas and this is true as well with the case of a foreign policy doctrine aimed at providing Israeli decision-makers with a clear roadmap. The three countries designated by Ben-Gurion back in the late fifties were no longer the close allies that Reuven Shiloah and his colleagues courted. But it appeared that the overarching philosophy that drove foreign policymakers – the matrix – remained the same. In all the cases covered in the next chapters, we found the logic of balancing against a threat (Iran) or a potential challenge (Turkey). The zero-sum game mindset was still salient, although it appeared less rigid than in the past. Because the ties with Israel's new allies were looser, they were less binding. Furthermore, the geographical perimeter of the "periphery" vastly enlarged as it encompassed countries as distant as Azerbaijan, or India, or even China. This also implied that the initial ambition to use the periphery to build a truly regional alliance was no longer on the agenda.

In fact, the starkest contrast between the old periphery and the new one was that all these new ties, including those with Greece, would be seen more as diplomatic scenery than fundamental strategic moves. In other words, they allowed Israel to avoid isolation, but they did not reassure the country against potential threats. Second, if the historical "periphery" was implemented by Ben-Gurion in close coordination with the American ally, this new one sometimes went against the stated interests of the US government: Israeli arms sales to countries such as Azerbaijan and China filled the void created by American embargoes against these countries; Israel's Greece policy exacerbated tensions between Athens and Ankara, two US allies and NATO members.

We can argue that the contemporary periphery approach reflected the strong perception of strategic isolation in Israel. The unravelling of Israel–Turkey relations coincided with the uprisings in the Arab world that led to a protracted crisis in Egypt, an intensified conflict in Syria and the weakening of Jordan, its last Arab partner standing.[5] All these developments contributed to the contemporary pessimism in Israel's foreign policy establishment. Janine Zacharia quotes for the *Washington Post* an Israeli official explaining the national view on the so-called Arab Spring: "When some people in the West see what's happening in Egypt they see Europe 1989. We see it as Tehran 1979."[6] In addition, as viewed from Jerusalem, the global landscape looked gloomy with the seeming lack of resolve of the Barack Obama administration vis-à-vis Iran – in particular on the issue of its nuclear program – and the perceived rise of anti-Israeli sentiments in Europe.

For these reasons, the resurrection of the periphery doctrine did not constitute a new grand strategy for Israel, but epitomized its current foreign policy predicaments. Eventually, it sheds light on the enduring prevalence among Israeli policymakers of the image of Israel as a citadel under siege. In this view, Israel cannot really rely on its allies, and as a result, can only negotiate temporary trade-offs with partners. Chapter 5 explains how Israel could build new relations with countries such as Greece and Azerbaijan while explicitly acknowledging the weakness of these partners and the limitations of the relations. Likewise, in Chapter 6 we look at how the periphery rhetoric has also been used with regards

to Israel's India policy or its discreet, and inconstant, exchanges with Arab monarchies from the Gulf Cooperation Council. All in all, this reveals how much the periphery was, from its outset, more about Israeli strategic culture than about a roadmap precisely circumscribed at the geographical level.

Notes

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6   The new periphery calculus

Israel's enterprise with Greece,
Azerbaijan, and South Sudan

In the new Israel's periphery setting, three countries appear to play the roles of
substitutes to Turkey, Iran, and Ethiopia: Greece, Azerbaijan, and South Sudan.
This chapter depicts the development of these contemporary relations while
emphasizing their "periphery" dimension. Indeed, the doctrine remains a key
factor to explain these rapprochements. In particular, as we delve into the details
of these new ties, we discover how Israeli policymakers, consciously or uncon-
sciously, updated the periphery matrix to keep its intellectual foundations – the
zero-sum game, the clandestine track, the emphasis on military-intelligence
exchanges and the threat-balancing approach. However, as witnessed in the
cases exposed in the following pages, the enterprise was less ambitious and its
achievements less compelling than with the early periphery doctrine.

The slow process of rapprochement between Israel and Greece[1]

Israel's current relation with Greece is the most revealing illustration of the
"periphery 2.0." Relations between both countries were for decades, limited if
not bad. Like Turkey, the government in Athens had voted against the UN Pales-
tine partition plan in November 1947 and refused to recognize *de jure* Israel in
1949. For scholar Amikam Nachmani, "When the war ended, Greece surpassed
even Egypt in its hostility toward Israel."[2] Eventually, consular relations were
established in 1952, but both countries would look at each other with great sus-
picion. According to Israeli diplomatic archives, cables sent from Athens expli-
citly identified Greece as "an enemy of Israel."[3] This animosity grew the
following decade when Israel and Turkey started cooperating and it became clear
that the former would support the latter on the sensitive issue of Cyprus.

In the seventies and eighties, anti-Israeli rhetoric in the political landscape in
Athens was common. For instance, in 1983, the socialist leader Papandreou
described the Israeli intervention in Lebanon as "Nazi" and "fascist."[4] The Arab
factor also played a major role in the Greek calculus: politicians in Athens feared
that a rapprochement with Jerusalem would antagonize Egypt and lead to eco-
nomic and physical pressures on the Greek community in the country. Addition-
ally, the shipping industry in Greece, a key source of the national revenues,

relied heavily on Arab States, thereby making cooperation with Israel detrimental to the whole economy. Eventually, Greece established full diplomatic relations with Israel, but that occurred only by 1990. Like with Turkey, the Oslo peace process had brought about a momentum which proved also effective in the case of Israel–Greece relations.

At that time, Israel–Greece relations also looked promising with a military agreement signed in 1994. It seemed for a short period of time as if the regional mindset of a zero-sum game had vanished and that it would allow Israel to foster cooperation with both countries at the same time. However, two years later, after the agreement with Turkey had been made public, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres tried in vain to relaunch the perspective of defense cooperation with the Greeks. Athens refused and political leaders started expressing their discontent concerning the Israeli–Turkish rapprochement.[5] It was a clear reminder that the zero-sum game still prevailed in the East Mediterranean.

It is only a decade later, when the Israeli–Turkish partnership fell apart, that Israel–Greece relations started improving. It was first initiated through military exchanges. Between May 28 and June 12, 2008, an exercise between the two national air forces called "Glorious Spartan" took place. The exercise involved about 100 Israeli and 80 Greek F-15 and F-16 fighter planes and helicopters. For the Israelis, it conveyed two significant messages. It first signaled that the long dormant military agreement between both countries – this agreement that had been signed a decade earlier but which never got implemented – could be, after all, active. But moreover, it sent a message of deterrence to Iran in the context of its nuclear program. Naming the exercise "Glorious Spartan" was not innocent as it reminded of the ancient city that stopped the Persians at the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 BC. The fact that the drill aimed to test the Israeli ability to carry out long-range strikes also raised the question of a potential Israeli campaign against Iran's nuclear plants.[6]

A year later, the relation upgraded to the political echelon. A meeting was held on October 15, 2009 in Athens between Greek and Israeli political insiders. They discussed the opportunity of strengthening the bilateral ties. The participants included advisors close to George Papandreou, who had been elected Greek Prime Minister a week earlier, and the gathering was called, according to Aristotle Tziampiris, "the Electra group" in reference to the Electra Hotel in Athens where discussions took place.[7] This informal network of like-minded advisors promoted the rapprochement to their respective leaders.

A new step was reached in February 2010 when Papandreou and Netanyahu met in Moscow. Both heads of government happened to be visiting Russia at the same time so a meeting was shortly arranged at Moscow's Café Pushkin on February 16, 2010 during which the two prime ministers discussed rather openly their foreign policy challenges.[8] The Café Pushkin meeting would be the starting point of intense exchanges between the two governments. It was then followed by various official high-level visits at the level of presidents, prime ministers, and defense ministers. In July 2010, Papandreou visited Jerusalem and Netanyahu travelled to Athens only a month later. As a result, a new cooperation

memorandum was signed. It widely expanded previous documents as various fields of common interest were now on the table: security exchanges, tourism, energy projects. The following year, Israel Defense Minister Ehud Barak and his Greek counterpart, Panos Beglitis, went further by passing a security cooperation agreement. Meanwhile, the Greek parliament approved the purchase of Israeli bomb-precision upgrade kits, which cost $155 million for 400 systems. Between 2010 and 2012, no fewer than 13 joint Greek–Israeli military exercises were conducted: among others, Minoas, Caya Green, Aegean Seal, Noble Dina, Passex, and Turning Point.[9]

This Israel–Greece rapprochement is not only visible in the military realm but also in other sectors such as tourism, culture, education and trade. Prior to the Papandreou visit of 2010, there were around 150 000 Israeli tourists each year coming to Greece. For 2012, they were estimated to reach 400 000.[10] Witnessing the rise of the bilateral relation, Greek President Karolos Papoulis visited Israel on July 10, 2011. During one interview there, he expressed his view on this recent rapprochement:

> Greece and Israel have rich and diverse ties […] Our Ministers and officials systematically consult and work together on all levels and in key areas: energy, defense and security, agriculture, tourism […] we are pursuing a strong relationship – strong on trade, strong on investment, strong on political, and security cooperation.[11]

In 2011, a joint ministerial cooperation council was set up to promote various cooperation programs. The institutional framework for the partnership grew in earnest following this initial step. The first High Level Cooperation Council involving the Secretaries General of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs from both countries took place on October 8, 2013. Soon, the consultations also included the Republic of Cyprus through trilateral meetings that evidenced the change in Israeli orientation in the East Mediterranean region.[12] The days when Israel supported Turkey's claims on the Cyprus issue were long gone.

More and more, news of the Israeli–Greek exchanges led to speculations concerning a shift in the regional power plays. Deeply frustrated by Turkish assertiveness, Israeli officials did not deny the analysis on their rapprochement with Greece and frequently conveyed the message that the relation had never been so high. Israeli Ambassador to Greece, Aryeh Mekel, explained to the on-line media, *Al Monitor*:

> Greek–Israel relations today are at an unprecedented peak. In the last three years, the relationship has undergone a dramatic changeover due to the decision of the two countries to open a new page and maintain long-term strategic cooperation without connection to relations with other countries.[13]

The last specification from Mekel is worth underlining and challenging: was this rapprochement really without any connection to relations with other countries?

True, the Israelis and the Greeks emphasized that cooperation did not come out of the blue in 2010, and that the first bilateral economic agreement was written in 1992 and the first military agreement in 1994 – in fact, before the one between Israel and Turkey. But the persistent view in the region was that the logic behind the "honeymoon" between Jerusalem and Athens remained the classic "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." This was not without embarrassment for the Greeks and the Israelis who wanted to see more than bitter politics in the rapprochement. In fact, it was in the interest of neither Greece nor Israel to confine their rapprochement to a move to counterbalance Turkey. Athens was not keen on using its Israeli policy to antagonize Ankara as recent Greek prime ministers committed their country to the enhancement of the relationship with its historical rival, in particular in the field of bilateral trade. For the Israelis, the first periphery alliance had taught that making the balancing factor the sole driver of a bilateral relation did not bind enough the allies, whether Turkey, or Iran, or Ethiopia.

Still, the timing of the rapprochement coincided a bit too much with the widening gap between Israel and Turkey. This is why Turkish leaders were obviously scrutinizing these developments. Military exercises engendered low-level tensions in the Mediterranean with sometimes the Turkish navy conducting maneuvers near Cyprus at the same time as the joint Israeli–Greek exercises.[14] But off the record, Turkish officials tended to dismiss their concerns, downplaying the strategic significance of this Israeli–Greek rapprochement. One diplomat sarcastically told us, "If Israel wants to counterbalance Turkey with a country in profound economic and political troubles like Greece, we [the Turks] should not be worried, the Israelis should!"[15]

When asked, Israeli officers and diplomats did not hide the fact that Greece was no substitute for Turkey. They clearly acknowledged that Athens had neither the geopolitical reach nor the military might of the historical ally of Israel. Not only was Greece enduring a financial crisis that eroded its military capabilities, but it never had the type of leverage Turkey enjoyed in the Middle East and that Israel crucially needed. But as one diplomat formerly assigned in Ankara stated, "Greece allows us to avoid complete isolation in the Mediterranean. Look at the current state of our neighbors: Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt. Desperate times call for desperate measures."[16]

There was important apprehension in Israel regarding the electoral victory of the left-wing Syriza party in Greece in January 2015, which led Alexis Tsipras to become the Prime Minister. Israeli diplomats feared that the left-wing platform conducted by Tsipras would see the rapprochement with Israel neither as a priority nor at least as a valuable asset. But it soon appeared that the Greek head of government would not challenge the new basis of the relation with Israel. In international fora, Greece continued under Tsipras's mandate to support Israel and frequently opposed any attempt to condemn it. For instance, in late 2015, Greece expressed its strong opposition to the European Union policy to label Israeli goods coming from settlements in Palestinian territories.[17] Paradoxically, over the last five years, Greek governments have been more unstable than those

of Turkey and Israel but they all have shown continuity on the issue of relations with Jerusalem, something that Aristotle Tziampiris describes as a kind of "papandreouism without Papandreou."[18]

In addition to the political–military exchanges, Greek–Israeli cooperation in the energy field also increased. Indeed, since late 2011, the rapprochement between Jerusalem and Athens has not only been driven by military goals, but also by economic prospects borne out of the discovery of natural gas reserves in the East Mediterranean. A US geological study in 2010 showed that the Levantine area could hold as much as 122 trillion cubic feet of recoverable gas.[19] Israeli companies have been so far the most advanced in preparing to extract gas from its exclusive economic zones. There, a consortium led by the American firm Noble Energy, composed of Israeli firms Delek and Avner Oil, have worked on the resources of two major gas fields, Leviathan and Tamar. Initially there were also high speculations regarding the gas field Aphrodite in Cyprus's exclusive economic zone but as of 2015, exploration proved less promising than expected.[20]

Still the discovery of these reserves generated a new area of cooperation between Greece, Cyprus, and Israel in terms of gas export projects. Israeli companies like Noble and Delek have worked closely with Greece and Cyprus in the extraction of other energy supplies. The project involves Israel and Cyprus creating a gas pipeline, and a LNG terminal with the gas being brought from there to Europe via Greece.[21] This option may be an attractive one for European countries eager to find an alternative to the Gazprom supply if diplomatic relations with Russia worsen – one third of European imports coming from Russia as of 2015. As a result, Israeli Energy Minister Uzi Landau stated in 2012 with a hint of optimism:

> in the Middle East, that is now caught in a tremendous earthquake, stretching from the Atlantic to the Persian Gulf and beyond, the axis of Greece, Cyprus, and Israel will provide an anchor of stability – and stability is highly important.[22]

Because it was assumed this energy bonanza would redraw the economic map of the region, it has been perceived as a major game changer.[23] For Israel, it could secure sufficient production for its domestic needs and furthermore it would represent a high opportunity for exports to Europe. For Greece and Cyprus, the export project may strengthen their geopolitical position within the EU and provide them with precious economic prospects as they face a protracted financial crisis.

But the project has not been without major uncertainties. Given its complexity, its cost has been estimated at 10 billion euro, which would include the extraction and the transportation to Europe.[24] Once the Final Investment Decision[25] to award the project is made, experts evaluate that it will take about six to seven years to complete. "It is technically challenging and because of that it might be financially challenging," summed up Guy Feldman, advisor to Silvan

Shalom, Israeli energy minister.[26] To address the issue of costs, Israel, Greece and Cyprus have been trying to make the case to the European Commission in Brussels to attract funding. As of January 2016, it had been qualified by the EU as a "project of common interest." This status was given by the European Commission to a list of 248 projects which have access to a 5.85 billion euro fund from the initiative Connecting Europe Facility between now and 2020. In 2015, the Greek company IGI Poseidon received 2 million euro for preliminary studies.[27] Although this demonstrates an interest from the EU for the project, political leaders in European capitals have been sensitive to the security and diplomatic issues that surrounds it.

Channeling energy supplies in the region like the Middle East has always been a major safety issue for investors. In this particular case, the Israeli military establishment expressed its apprehension regarding the project. Locating export facilities outside Israeli territory is considered as a liability by the military and it was recommended in a special investigation led by the Tzemach committee that the infrastructure be placed under Israeli sovereignty.[28] This led the Israeli Navy to push in 2014 for a supplementary budget of $820 million as it estimated it would need four new vessels and manpower to secure the facilities. So far, the Israeli government did not accede to this claim.[29]

This Israel–Greece–Cyprus initiative logically triggered strong opposition from Turkey, which objected to the claims of the Greek Cypriot Administration over the gas reserves in the south of the island. Ankara responded by conducting air and sea military drills close to the area of the planned project. In August 2011 Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu threatened that Turkey would "show the proper reaction" if the three countries were to go on with the project.[30] A later statement from the Turkish Foreign Ministry elaborated on Ankara's claims:

> International law dictates that the delimitation of the continental shelf or the exclusive economic zone in the eastern Mediterranean, which is indeed a semi-enclosed sea, should be effected between the relevant states in an equitable manner […] The Greek Cypriot Administration does not represent in law or in fact the Turkish Cypriots and Cyprus as a whole. […] These unlawful acts create tension in the region, compromise and prejudge the Turkish Cypriots' existing and inherent equal rights over the natural resources of the island.[31]

Turkey had its own ambitions as an energy hub for Europe through the Southern Gas Corridor. Since the failure of the Nabucco project, Turkey signed a memorandum of understanding with Azerbaijan on the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline, which could provide Europe with natural gas supplies.

But politics aside, competition between Turkey, Greece, Israel, and Cyprus is not unavoidable. There is a strong economic incentive for regional cooperation. If the Greek–Cypriot–Israeli project was to include Turkey, it could become a more reliable option, both economically and politically. In terms of feasibility, a pipeline reaching Turkey from Israel would represent half the distance of the

Cyprus–Israel option. Engineers estimate that it could cost around $2 billion, which appears much more attractive than the $11 billion for the first project.[32] Politically, it would lower the risks of regional tensions as it puts away from the equation the Greek–Turkish dispute over Cyprus. But this assumes governments in both Turkey and Israel to settle their dispute. Despite the commercial incentives, it appears today that the gas conundrum will only be solved through a restoration of bilateral ties at the political level.

Furthermore, the Israeli–Cypriot natural gas project might not be so promising economically: the decrease of oil prices since 2014 harmed the world gas markets, and in the longer term, the new discovery in Egypt of possibly the "largest ever" offshore natural gas field could well lower the export prospects for Israel and Cyprus.[33]

Azerbaijan as an uncertain substitute to Iran

Although Azerbaijan rarely makes the headlines in Western media or think tank publications, it has evolved into an important actor of Israel's "periphery 2.0." Israeli Analyst Gallia Lindenstrauss went as far as to describe it as "the Muslim country with which Israel currently enjoys the closest relations."[34] Trade has increased in the last years with Israel becoming one of the country's top five commercial partners. In the energy sector, Baku provides around 40 percent of Israel's oil consumption. In 2012, Azerbaijan and Israel signed an arms supply agreement worth $1.6 billion, which included Israel selling drones and missile defense systems to Azerbaijan. This rapprochement not surprisingly riled Azerbaijan's neighbor Iran, which strongly condemned Baku's decision.[35]

Azerbaijan surely has an interest in hedging against Iran, as the regime in Tehran remains a key ally of Armenia. Although both Azerbaijan's and Iran's populations are primarily of Shia creed, the former accuses the latter of trying to impose its political model. In the 1990s, Iran supported the Armenians during the war over Nagorno-Karabakh, one of its motives being the presence of a significant community of ethnic Azeris in Iran (believed to be the largest minority in the country which accounts for roughly a fifth of Iran's total population). In the meantime, the regime in Tehran considers with great concerns Azerbaijan's ambitions with the Azeris in Iran. This has sometimes been portrayed as Baku's dreams of a "greater Azerbaijan," which would cover all the regions of the Caucasus where Azeris live.[36] Additionally, Iran and Azerbaijan have competed for the division of natural resources in the Caspian Sea.

Against all odds, the leadership of Azerbaijan, an autocratic Republic whose majority of the people adheres to Shia Islam, soon perceived Israel as a potential ally. For Azerbaijan, it is a convenient partner to balance against Tehran. As a result, Iranian authorities expressed discontent and feared that such a rapprochement aimed to entangle Tehran. In addition, Israeli weapons systems are valuable in the context of the OSCE embargo on arms sales to Azerbaijan.[37] The leadership in Baku, however, is unlikely to cross the threshold of a full alliance with Israel for fear of Tehran's reaction. Reflecting this caution, Baku has not

opened an embassy in Israel, and it voted at the UN General Assembly in favor of granting observer status to Palestine in 2012.[38]

To understand these current bilateral exchanges between Jerusalem and Baku, we need to go back two decades ago. In the early nineties, Israel feared Arab and Iranian influence in the new Central Asian States. In January 1992, a visit by Yasser Arafat to Kazakhstan led to its recognition of the Palestinian State. Soon, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan were similarly courted. Israeli–Azerbaijani diplomatic relations were established on April 7, 1992, only a few months after the declaration of independence of Azerbaijan. However, the Azerbaijani authorities refrained from opening a diplomatic mission, justifying this position by pointing out "political constraints" and "its complicated geopolitical situation, particularly its proximity to Iran, as well as its membership in international Islamic organizations."[39] Still, the offices of the Azerbaijani National Airline in Israel played the role of unofficial channel for government-to-government communication. 1992 saw the creation of a society for Azerbaijani–Israeli cultural ties in Baku named AZIZ ("my dear" in Azeri). After Jews from Azerbaijan migrated to Israel, it became the International Association of Azerbaijani–Israeli Friendship.

On August 29, 1997, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made an official visit to Baku, meeting with President Heydar Aliyev. The talks covered cooperation in the field of energy, science, technology, agriculture, medicine trade and telecommunications. The final speech of Netanyahu expressed the high expectations concerning the bilateral relation:

> We are two ancient peoples who have achieved independence in the last decades and now the task for us as independent nations is to continue to develop our countries […] this gives us hope that all the children of Abraham can find peace and friendship under the same sun that rises over the Caspian Sea and sets over Mediterranean.[40]

Netanyahu's rhetoric echoed the one Israeli officials had used with Ethiopia back in the fifties: both countries were modern independent States whose history was ancient and interconnected. Following Netanyahu's visit, the Iranian State radio commented "Baku has been playing a dangerous game by receiving the Zionist regime's expansionist prime minister. By doing this it has destabilized its own ties with Islamic States in the region and the world."[41] Likewise, the Armenian authorities condemned the visit and depicted the Israeli–Azerbaijani cooperation as dangerous for the regional stability.[42]

According to a study conducted by the Israeli scholar Alexander Murinson, 28 diplomatic and official state exchange visits between the 2 countries took place following this first Netanyahu–Aliyev meeting between 1999 and 2014.[43] In May 2009, President Shimon Peres travelled to Azerbaijan and Minister of Foreign Affairs Avigdor Lieberman visited the country three times during his mandate (February 2010, April 2012, and April 2014). In September 2014, for the first time, an Israeli Defense Minister, Moshe Ya'alon, went to Baku.

Despite the appearance that the bilateral relation was merely about countering Iran, both Israeli and Azerbaijani officials have tried to emphasize the role of common values. Interviewed by the Azerbaijani news agency *Trend News*, former Israeli President Shimon Peres said, "a lot of things unite us … Muslims and Christians can live without hatred and fanaticism. That is why Azerbaijan for me is a special country which I can trust."[44] Such rhetoric reminds the romantic depiction of Ethiopia in the seventies by the same Peres.

In a US diplomatic cable sent from the American Embassy in Baku on January 13, 2009 and later leaked by Wikileaks, Political Counselor Rob Garverick described the "discreet symbiosis" between Azerbaijan and Israel:

> Each country finds it easy to identify with the other's geopolitical difficulties and both rank Iran as an essential security threat. Israel's world-class defense industry with its relaxed attitude about its customer base is a perfect match for Azerbaijan's substantial defense needs that are largely left unmet by the United States, Europe and Russia.[45]

Later in the cable, Garverick underlined the logic of secrecy surrounding the bilateral ties:

> Aptly described by Azerbaijani President Aliyev as being like an iceberg, nine-tenths of it is below the surface, this relationship is also marked by a pragmatic recognition by Israel of Azerbaijan's political need to hew publicly and in international forums to the OIC's general line.[46]

Till this day, the most significant field of the bilateral cooperation has been the arms trade, with Israeli companies being extremely active in Azerbaijan. Since 2009, Elbit Systems operates a local office "Elbit Systems of Azerbaijan." It has worked on the Cardom self-propelled recoiling mortar and provided advanced upgrades to the Russian-made T-72 tanks. In February 2012, both countries signed an arms-supply agreement valued at $1.6 billion, which included drones and anti-aircraft/missile-defense systems delivered by Israel Aerospace Industries to Azerbaijan.[47] Likewise, Rafael exported Spike anti-tank missiles and targeting systems to the Azerbaijani military. In 2014, the media *Defense News* estimated that the arms deals signed by the Israelis in Baku amounted "nearly $4 billion in arms deals over the past three years," turning the Caucasus Republic into one of the biggest export markets for Israeli defense companies.[48]

Israel and Azerbaijan also cooperated in the field of counterterrorism. In 2008, Azerbaijani authorities declared that they had prevented a car bomb attack against the American and Israeli Embassies in Baku. The operatives caught by the law enforcement agency were Lebanese citizens with ties to Hezbollah and Iran. Hezbollah was also later accused of having paid local criminal gang members $150 000 each to foment an attack on the Jewish School in Baku.[49]

This trend led to concerns from many parts: not only from neighboring Iran and Armenia, who fear that this would embolden Azerbaijan as a regional player,

but also from European countries and the OSCE, which still enforce the embargo and consider Israel's arms deals as a potential driver of instability in Nagorno-Karabakh. Moreover, some voices in Israel condemned the rapprochement. In April 2015, Yair Auron, a professor at Israel's Open University, wrote a much-discussed editorial in *Haaretz* titled "David and Goliath in the Caucasus." Describing the similarities between the fate of Armenian and Jewish people, Auron concluded on the Israeli inclination toward Azerbaijan: "I am nagged by the thought that we Israelis, too, are fighting a David and Goliath war, only with the roles reversed from what they were a half-century ago."[50] Again, Israel's strategic choices were not driven by ideological considerations but by the matrix that had already led the country to side with authoritarian regimes because they shared a common threat or because, at least they could balance a third part.

Another major issue emerged in late March 2012 when the historian Mark Perry published an article in *Foreign Policy*, arguing that Israeli forces had gained access to airbases in Azerbaijan.[51] According to his diplomatic and intelligence sources, Perry argued that Israel had been granted access to airfields on Iran's northern border:

> The Azeri military has four abandoned, Soviet-era airfields that would potentially be available to the Israelis, as well as four airbases for their own aircraft […] The U.S. intelligence and diplomatic officials told me they believe that Israel has gained access to these airbases through a series of quiet political and military understandings.[52]

Perry's allegation reinforced the rumors of an imminent Israeli air campaign against Iranian nuclear facilities. Logically, it triggered official denials from both Israel and Azerbaijan. But even among observers, the Perry piece was met with skepticism. In an incendiary article published for *Times of Israel* and titled "Perry tales in Foreign Policy," journalist Ehud Yaari debunked the alleged revelation:

> How would the Israeli Air Force reach those airbases in Azerbaijan? Are the Israelis going to get a permit from Mr. Erdogan to fly over Turkey on their way to hit Iran? […] Does Mr. Perry want us to believe that the Israelis will choose to bypass Turkey on their secret mission via the longer route over Greece and Bulgaria, thus becoming fully exposed to Russian radar in the Black Sea?[53]

Since then the Azerbaijani authorities have been very cautious not to convey such messages to Iran. At the beginning, Turkey had played an instrumental role in the rapprochement between Israel and Azerbaijan. Azeris speak a dialect of Turkish, and the ties between Baku and Ankara are old. Both Israel and Turkey supported the Azerbaijanis in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and both supplied Baku with arms and military equipment used in the conflict with Armenia.[54] For a short period of time, around 2008–2009, the relation between Baku and Ankara was challenged because of Turkey's new Armenia policy. In 2009, the Turks

and the Armenians had reached an agreement on a "road map" that included normalizing ties and the establishment of full diplomatic relations as well as the opening of borders.[55] Logically, Turkey's move was strongly criticized by Azerbaijan, which feared this protocol was jeopardizing Turkey's support to Baku in the struggle over the Nagorno-Karabakh region. But soon, not only did the Turkish–Armenian agreement stumble, but Ankara and Baku moved closer to each other with the signature in August 2010 of a 10-year strategic partnership and mutual assistance agreement. The document specified in particular that if one side was attacked by a third country, the other one would provide its support.[56] It is worth noting that the deterioration of Israel–Turkey relations did not affect those with Azerbaijan.[57]

Finally, one of the other drivers, regarding Azerbaijani cooperation with Israel, is the role that the latter might play as a mediator between Baku and Washington. Progressively, Azerbaijani officials traveling to the US capital met with representatives of the American Israeli Political Action Committee and other organizations. In 2015, a delegation from the American Jewish Committee visited Baku and its executive director, David Harris, said very explicitly:

> Our message is clear and consistent: Azerbaijan is an important strategic partner for the United States and the West, as well as a valued friend of Israel and the Jewish people. In an increasingly turbulent world, Azerbaijan's contributions to regional stability, energy security, counter-terrorism operations, and religious tolerance are all things to be valued.[58]

Like other countries that embarked on clandestine or discreet relations with Israel, Azerbaijan deeply believed that by doing so, it would gain support from the pro-Israel lobby in Washington.[59] Such a perception is so ingrained in the mindset of local decision-makers and policy commentators that it reveals the core ambiguity of the rapprochement: Israel is in this perspective perceived as a means to reach the US. Noticeably, it is a complete reversal of Ben-Gurion's and Shiloah's idea to make Israel the bridge of the Americans in the Middle East.

In the end, Azerbaijan might offer investment opportunities and access to the Caucasus to Israel, but overall it is no substitute to the Shah's Iran. Like Greece, Azerbaijan is a small country whose ability to counterbalance regional players is limited. Therefore, the rapprochement does not convince as a serious case of external balancing against the apparent common threat from Iran.

The brief rapprochement with South Sudan

Some observers have also added to this "periphery 2.0" the country of South Sudan, which would logically replace Ethiopia as the new African partner to Israel. Indeed, the State of Israel was among the first countries to recognize the new State on July 10, 2011, only a day after its declaration of independence. The two governments announced the establishment of diplomatic relations on July 28, 2011. In an official statement, Foreign Minister Liberman declared that "the cooperation

between the two countries will be based on solid foundations, relations of equality and mutual respect."[60] South Sudan President Salva Kiir travelled to Israel as soon as December of the same year.[61] As a result, ambassadors have been sent in each other's capital. Cooperation was launched in the field of agriculture, science and technology, infrastructure and there have also been reports of Israel providing military equipment to South Sudanese forces. Additionally, Israeli oil companies have worked with local partners to extract the local reserves.[62]

Historically, Israel envisioned close relations with the modern Sudanese State since its independence in 1956 but the coup two years later in Khartoum jeopardized the project. Still over the following decades, Israeli planners would discuss various projects with Sudanese authorities. Because it bordered Egypt on its southern flank, Sudan was seen as a potential peripheral ally. In the eighties, Israel even explored the possibility of "using Sudan as a base of operations, aimed at helping the son of the deposed Shah of Iran to return to Iran and topple Ayatollah Khomeini's regime."[63] But, the rulers in Khartoum conducted a fierce anti-Israeli foreign policy. It worsened as it became evident that Israel was supplying arms to the rebels, the Anya Nya independence movement, in the predominately Christian Southern region of Sudan.

South Sudan was, in many ways, an obvious candidate for Israel's new periphery. A small and newly established State composed of a Christian and animist population, South Sudan constituted an asset for Israel's ambition to hedge against traditional Arab Muslim regimes. The government of Khartoum – South Sudan's archenemy – had been for years a strong supporter of Iran. The Iran–Sudan cooperation started after the coup in Khartoum led by Brigadier Omar al Bashir in 1989. For years, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards had been training, funding and supplying the Sudanese armed forces. President Al Bashir repeatedly took stances to support Iran's nuclear program and in return Ayatollah Khamenei told him in 2006 that "the Islamic Republic is ready to transfer this experience and the technology and knowledge of its [nuclear] scientists."[64] Several high-level meetings took place between ministers and military representatives, alarming more and more the Israeli intelligence community. Iran has been said to use Sudan as a hub for arms smuggling to Lebanon and Gaza through the Sinai Peninsula.[65] The US diplomatic cables revealed by Wikileaks, put into light Israeli concerns over Iranian–Sudanese relations. In 2009, Benjamin Netanyahu described to American officials "a steady flow of Iranian weapons to Gaza through Sudan or Syria and then by sea."[66]

Although the authorities in Jerusalem neither confirmed nor denied, Israel's Air Force has been suspected of conducting several raids on Sudan over the last years. In October 2012, fighters bombed a factory in Khartoum storing Iranian arms to be transferred to Hamas in Gaza.[67] From that perspective, siding with the South Sudanese forces was for Israel a rather usual move of countering one threat by supporting a third part.

Nevertheless, the partnership proved ill-timed as the country plunged into a civil war. Like in Lebanon with the Phalangists, Israel soon found itself in a shaky position supporting a regime in the midst of social uprising. In 2015, a UN

panel of experts wrote in a report that "Israeli-produced automatic rifles were identified" in South Sudan during the 2013–2015 civil war.[68] Israeli authorities later stated that they had stopped selling lethal weapons to South Sudan at the outbreak of the internal conflict, but the controversy did not stop there.

In July 2015, one Israeli parliamentarian, Tamar Zandberg, from the Meretz Party, sent a letter to the Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon accusing the government of maintaining its export policy to South Sudan. Evidence included the visit a month earlier of an official South Sudanese delegation to the International Defense and Security Expo in Tel Aviv and the indication that Israeli arms dealers had been recently flying to Juba, the capital of South Sudan.[69] Beyond the issue of Israel selling arms to a government in the midst of a civil war, the crisis reflected the shortcomings of the rapprochement and the unlikelihood of any progress in the bilateral relations on the short term. Moreover, Israeli strategic interest for South Sudan seemed to decrease as the government in Khartoum operated in early 2016 a rebalancing of its alliances in the Middle East. After announcing that they would sever their ties with Iran in January in the context of the tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran, Sudanese authorities also declared they were willing to consider an American proposal to normalize ties with Israel.[70] Khartoum's shift challenged the inner logic of Israel's rapprochement with South Sudan and rendered this one even more counterproductive.

The periphery of the weak?

Although the logic of the original periphery clearly transpires from the contemporary cooperation between Israel and Greece, Azerbaijan, and South Sudan, these partnerships have obvious limitations. The first one is that they did not bring about the military power nor the political influence that Turkey, Iran, and even Ethiopia had. Therefore, the effect of external balancing was modest. The case of South Sudan is a special one as it was, from the outset, a rather limited initiative with no major expectations. However, in the case of Greece and Azerbaijan, it is worth assessing the analogy with the historical periphery. Whereas the Turks and the Iranians played a major role of regional balancers against the Arab world during the Cold War, the Greeks and the Azerbaijanis were secondary competitors in the modern regional competition and could not decisively affect the distribution of power.

Azerbaijan's strategic value to Israel relied heavily on the endurance of Aliyev regime and the future of its oil resources. Baku, which was branded as the future "Dubai of the Caucasus,"[71] started to face critical energy challenges. As of 2016, oil production accounted for 90 percent of the country's exports but since 2010 the reserves have decreased and no new discoveries have been made, putting the country at the risk of running out of oil by 2025.[72] Furthermore, Azerbaijan has been experiencing a severe economic crisis since 2015, with the fall of oil prices causing two currency devaluations and social discontent. Without the leverage oil production offers, it may be difficult for the regime to resist domestic change. Moreover, it weakens its strategic ambitions.

Greece's fortunes have been known since the beginning of its debt crisis in 2010 and the following bailouts. Since then, defense expenditures have been reduced by 54 percent to 4 billion euro in 2014. Still, the Greek military budget remains above the average of NATO countries if we consider that Athens was spending 2.2 percent of its GDP on defense in 2014.[73]

The weaknesses of both Greece and Azerbaijan imply several effects. Because they are not major players, they are more likely to experience pressures from third parties. In particular, Azerbaijan has been under strong demands from Muslim countries following the allegations that it could enable Israel to use its airfields to launch an attack on Iran. More generally, this creates a loose, if not fuzzy, set of partnerships that do not qualify for alliances. Baku benefits from Israeli military technology, but in the meantime maintains its diplomatic relations with Tehran. In the East Mediterranean, the subregional competition can be characterized as a volatile regional system in which alliances are no longer stable blocs. This is reflected by the ambivalent games played by the three main actors. Each of them is trying to seek seemingly contradictory goals: Israel wants to restore its ties with Turkey while hedging against Ankara's policies *via* a rapprochement with Greece; Greece aims to strengthen its military and commercial relations with Israel but not without openly defying Turkey; Turkey still benefits from Israeli military know-how but expresses strong condemnations of the Netanyahu government, and moreover it dismisses the Israeli–Greek rapprochement while it uses its Navy in the Mediterranean area as a means of coercive diplomacy against competing forces. All of this generates an odd zero-sum game: every stakeholder pretends the rules of this game still apply but bypasses them.

Finally, the "periphery 2.0" has no trilateral, or multilateral, ambition. Again, if Ben-Gurion's enterprise led to trilateral cooperation – albeit limited – between the Israelis, the Iranians, and the Turks, there appears to be no such expectation on the new strategy to be regional. In that perspective, it may look like a mere aggregation of unrelated bilateral relations that do not qualify all together for a regional strategy. This puts into question the geopolitical value of the concept: if the periphery does not encompass a specific region nor does it reflect a concrete Israeli strategy for that zone, what are we supposed to take from it? It would be misleading to discard the concept because of these flaws. More than in its early stages, the periphery constitutes, today, a reflection of Israel's strategic culture, of Israel's self-projection in its international environment. Its deeply ingrained sentiment of isolation fueled a *tous-azimuts* approach of engagement with peripheral countries. This is why, as we see in the final chapter, the periphery strategy has literally evolved into a catch-all concept.

Notes

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7 Toward the periphery of all?

From the outset, the periphery concept was more about geopolitical imagination than about a precise geographical space with physical boundaries. It expressed Israel's perception of isolation and its need to overcome it. But if the initial logic of the alliance was explicitly to counterbalance the threat of pan-Arabism, the calculus evolved and, as we saw in the previous chapter, now looks more like a hedging strategy than a countering approach. In other words, Israel hedges its security bets about the uncertain intentions, cooperative or competitive, of other countries.[1]

The consequence of this new mindset is that the new ties are less binding for all sides and leave leeway to develop competitive relations with third parties that can eventually involve conflicts of interest and contradictory policies. This explains why Israeli diplomats often downplay the strategic significance of the new relations: they are part of a loose web of diplomatic and military – sometimes clandestine – relations the Israelis assembled to hedge against the potential threat of enemies such as Iran and the perception of declining Israeli–West relations.

From that perspective, the expression "periphery" has been used in different places far away from the Middle East. If Greece, Azerbaijan, or South Sudan could be described as the periphery of the initial periphery – the one built in the fifties – other countries like India, China, and Saudi Arabia have been named as potential peripheral allies.[2] Such a list defies the geographical boundaries of the concept. A South Asian power like India shares no border with Arab countries and is not a neighbor of any significant threat to Israel. The same could be said of China. In the case of the rulers of Saudi Arabia, they do share with Israel a similar assessment of Iran as a threat, but as an Arab country, they also have deep ties – political, financial, and military – to the "core" that Israel is historically trying to counter. In that perspective, even with a very loose understanding of the periphery, putting the new countries together makes no geographical sense.

Whereas the initial periphery from the fifties aimed to build a regional policy – although it was eventually abandoned – this new one seemingly aggregated bilateral relations with no connection to each other, except the vague aspiration to revive the idea of the periphery. Moreover, a careful look at the content of the relations reveals how limited and primarily speculative they are, particularly in

the case of Israel–Gulf relations. In that context, this last chapter aims to look at the rapprochement between Israel and these countries and to stress the hedging logic that drive Israel's strategy.

Israel's look-east policy

In one of his essays written in 1953 and titled "Israel among the Nations," David Ben-Gurion foresaw "the waning hegemony of Europe and the rise of Asia."[3] Ben-Gurion added, "once again, two great and ancient nations – India and China – stride out into independence. Their weight in the scales of humanity is increasing and is likely to tip those scales more yet hereafter."[4] Today, Israel's relations with these two Asian powers have reached an impressive level. In 2015, during a visit by Indian President Pranab Mukherjee to Jerusalem, Prime Minister Netanyahu declared, "We appreciate Europe, but we admire Asia."[5] This trend is a combination of various factors: the first and most obvious one is the market that constitutes Asian countries for Israeli technology companies; the second is the expressed desire from the Israeli decision-makers to diversify their strategic partnerships in the context of tensions with European and American allies; finally, the third is a more cultural argument which relates to the history of Asian–Israeli relations. An adviser to the Netanyahu government told the author in January 2015:

> it is much easier for us to talk with the officials from Singapore, China, or India or more generally Asian countries because there is not the weight of the past, there is not this unhealthy mix of guiltiness and suspicion we would find when we negotiate with the Europeans or even with the Americans.[6]

The absence of a Chinese history of anti-Semitism was similarly noted by the Israeli scholar, Alexander Pevzner, in an opinion piece from the Jewish Telegraph Agency. Pevzner wrote:

> Jews […] have been living in China since at least the 10th century without suffering persecution. During World War II, some 20,000 European Jews found refuge from the Nazis in Shanghai. With Jews now facing increasing hostility in Europe, China's attitude is a welcome respite.[7]

Interestingly, the absence of historical or cultural legacy was initially seen as an obstacle. In her memoirs, Golda Meir wrote that "Asia was something else. It lay outside the traditions of the Old Testament and there was more need to explain and interpret who we were and where we came from." She then recalled the relation between former Burmese prime minister, U Nu, and Ben-Gurion:

> Even a man as cultured as the former Burmese prime minister, U Nu, once told our ambassador to Rangoon, David Hacohen, that he had known nothing at all about us until one day "by accident, I came across a book,"

and it was only then, when he read the Bible as an adult, that he discovered the existence of the Jews. As a matter of fact, what may well have made U Nu's relationship with Ben-Gurion so warm was that Ben-Gurion also only learned about Buddhism relatively late in life.[8]

Knowledge of Judaism has generally improved in Asia since Meir's description. For instance, South Korean pupils study the Talmud, which is seen as a "book of wisdom" that should be included in the high school curriculum.[9] All of these elements witness the contemporary significance of Israel's Asia rapprochement. This is particularly true in the case of Israel–India relations.

In the case of Asian countries, the periphery approach did not imply deep military cooperation but it fulfilled one objective that had been neglected in the past: Israel's quest for legitimacy. Although relations with Iran and Turkey during the first era of the periphery were closer, they were not public. Both China and India made their cooperation with Israel public. Interestingly, all sides saw a benefit: China and India recognized the Jewish State approximately at the same time after the Cold War, a move that was also intended to please the US in order to improve their own relations with Washington. Meanwhile, for Israel, it achieved public recognition after having failed in other places.

The growth of India–Israel relations

Of all Israel's Asian partners, India is the one that generated the largest expectations. There is a feeling in Israel that the rapprochement with New Delhi is not only about technical cooperation but about a deep bond between the two nations. According to some Israeli defense intellectuals, the ongoing developments pave the way for a "great alliance between two democracies."[10] Interestingly, the Israelis tend to look at their relation with India the same way the American policy community looks at it: as a "natural alliance."[11]

But the Indian–Israeli rapprochement was by no means a natural process and it has been in the making for more than two decades. Not so long ago, India maintained significant distance with Israel. Back in 1938, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (also known as Mahatma Gandhi) wrote in the *Harijan* weekly: "Palestine belongs to the Arabs in the same sense that England belongs to the English and France to the French."[12] For years, this statement summarized the mindset of Indians vis-à-vis the Israel–Palestine issue. India recognized Israel as a State in 1950, but for several decades maintained a traditional pro-Palestinian policy that gave authorities in Delhi leverage with Arab leaders. India–Pakistan rivalry played an indirect role: India's support to Palestine was also a means to counter Pakistan's influence in the Arab world. Another factor to explain India's distance from Israel was its non-aligned agenda, the country being a founding member of the Nonaligned Movement. India was one of the first non-Arab states to recognize Palestinian independence. Still, even though there was public distance, India and Israel had discreet relations during the Cold War, in particular in the intelligence domain with cooperation between Mossad

and Indian intelligence agency, the RAW (Research and Analysis Wing).[13] Israel offered help and support to India during the 1962 war with China and the 1965 war with Pakistan.

Public relations only started after the end of the Cold War, in 1992.[14] At the diplomatic level, annual bilateral consultations between the Indian Ministry of External Affairs and Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs started in 1999 and have taken place alternately in Jerusalem and New Delhi. Optimists in Israel have seen the rapprochement with India as a major step in the process of normalization of Israel. In that perspective, India is perceived as a potential pivot that could lead to better cooperation between Israel and Asian countries.

The 2003 visit to India of Ariel Sharon, while he was prime minister, constituted a milestone. It indicated the new public dimension of bilateral cooperation: it was no longer a taboo for the Indians to collaborate with the Israelis and it remained intact despite political changes in both countries. Numerous statements have been made on both sides regarding the commonalities of threats facing the two countries. While on a trip to Washington in May 2003, Brajesh Mishra, Indian national security advisor, argued that India, Israel, and the United States should form an alliance to fight against Islamic fundamentalism.[15] This idea came from the realization that the rhetoric from Jihadi movements such as Al Qaeda regularly emphasized the call to liberate both Palestine and Kashmir.

After Sharon's visit, the special forces of the two countries convened joint military exercises.[16] Israeli know-how in communication and control systems also proved valuable to the Indian Army for purposes of improving the information networks of its Russian T-72 tanks.[17] Military-to-military relations also became closer, particularly in the field of counterterrorism following the 2008 Mumbai attacks. The first bilateral talks in the field of counterterrorism started in 2000, in the shadow of the second Intifada that was looming in Israel and Palestine. Over the following years, the Indo-Israeli joint working group on counterterrorism grew in earnest and both sides expanded its scope. Indian armed forces expressed growing interest in Israeli counterterrorism techniques, which led to the initial setting up of military exercises alongside the existing joint working group.[18] In addition, Israeli soldiers trained their Indian counterparts in the field of anti-insurgency strikes, counter hijacking and hostage crisis situations.

India also benefited from Israel's defense technology. In fact, Israel has become India's second largest arms supplier, after Russia. In the 1990s, the Indian Navy purchased two Dvora MK-2 patrol boats worth $10 million, while Israel Aircraft Industries upgraded Russian-made MiG-21 aircraft owned by the Indian Air Force. Back in January 2002, the United States approved a transfer of missile technology to India that Israel had acquired through the Arrow missile defense program.[19] The Indians bought Tavor assault rifles and Galil sniper rifles, among other capabilities, to reinforce their counterinsurgency forces. The scope of arms sales between the two countries is wide: it includes antimissile technologies, radar systems, drones, night-vision equipment. In 2016, India's purchases of Israeli military equipment amounted to approximately $3billion making India the world's biggest customer of Israeli arms technologies.[20]

There are noteworthy contradictions regarding the Indo-Israeli rapprochement. On the one hand, such a partnership creates considerable discontent among the Muslim community in India (about 140 million people) and this weakens popular support for the government.[21] On the other hand, the Israeli authorities care little about the South Asian security complex: Israel's increasingly prominent role as the prime arms supplier to India from the 1990s on coincided for some time with the building of close ties with China, and even Pakistan, in the same domain, two countries that have been at war with India.

Moreover, to see the rapprochement as part of Israel's periphery approach may be misleading. Although both countries gain from cooperation, the balancing logic behind the periphery doctrine has been so far absent from their calculus. This is exemplified by the fact that India maintains good relations with Iran and does not consider that its Israeli policy should be driven by its already existing ties with Iran.

In the military domain, India and Iran still have a shared interest in maritime security along the shores of the Indian Ocean. This is why India overrode Western and Gulf discontent in inviting Iran to join the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, an Indian Navy initiative convened on a regular basis to increase comprehensive naval cooperation among littoral states on the Indian Ocean. Admittedly, with the exception of counter-piracy efforts, the level of defense cooperation is nevertheless very low. Even if India does not consider Iran to be a strong ally, the bilateral activities reflect its intention not to abide by the rules of the Israeli zero-sum game.

Likewise, the Israeli government has also been suspected of selling military wares to Pakistan, India's neighboring foe. In June 2013, the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* stirred a controversy in the defense community with the assertion that Israel sold military wares to Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, and Pakistan.[22] The *Haaretz* article was based on an export control report prepared by the UK Foreign Office that listed the countries that received this equipment. The first reaction of the Israeli Ministry of Defense was to issue a statement saying:

> Israel has a strategic relationship with India, the strongest democracy in the world – which, like Israel, deals with terrorist threats and serves as a major anchor in global international relations. The State of Israel does nothing that could compromise its excellent relations with India.[23]

In the end, the revelations of Israeli arms deals with Pakistan did not change the course of the relations between Jerusalem and New Delhi because, rhetoric aside, the India–Israel relationship is not a "natural" alliance but a partnership forged by mutual interests. These facts put matters into their broader perspective. It emphasizes the speculative dimension of the on-going fad about Israel–India relations and it militates against the likelihood of a future strategic rapprochement. Furthermore, it shows that the balancing dimension of the periphery strategy seems absent in the India–Israel relations. This cooperation appears more driven by economic prospects and a certain hedging approach vis-à-vis the US rather than by the objective to counter a common threat.

The delicate ties between Israel and China

Israel did not only sell arms to Pakistan, it did it as well with India's other rival, China. China–Israel relations have been the topic of heated controversies. Officially, these relations were first established in January 1992 and have developed steadily. In 2000, Chinese President Jiang Zeming paid a historic visit to Israel while, on the other side, four Israeli presidents and three prime ministers have travelled to Beijing. But the ties can be traced back much earlier. In December 1918, Chen Lu, the vice-minister of foreign affairs of the Kuomintang government in Nanjing expressed his support to the Balfour Declaration.[24]

Ben-Gurion, an admirer of China, insisted that the Hebrew University in Jerusalem build a Chinese department. In 1950, Israel was among the first countries to recognize Mao's People's Republic of China. But quickly the bipolar logic of the Cold War put a distance between the two countries.[25] The North Korean invasion of the South in 1950 led Israel to support the role of the United Nations and the following American intervention. This Israeli decision meant the premature end to a policy of nonalignment some members of Ben-Gurion cabinet sought to maintain.[26]

Despite the Cold War environment, and their affiliation to opposing blocs, Israel and China aimed to maintain diplomatic ties. In the early fifties, both countries considered normalizing their relations but soon the US government pressured Israel into choosing one side.[27] After Israel's decision to align itself on the American position, China would start developing its relation with the Arab States and voting against Israel in multilateral fora. At Bandung, where non-aligned powers met in 1955, China supported the Arab project to boycott Israel. Mao's rhetoric against Western hegemony progressively included stances against Israel. In 1965, during a meeting with representatives of the PLO, the Chinese leader said "Imperialism fears China and the Arabs. Israel and Taiwan are bases of operation for Imperialism in Asia. They created Israel for the Arabs and Taiwan for us. They both have the same objective."[28]

However, the following decade would see the Cold War competition dramatically evolving. With the rise of USSR–China tensions, the Nixon administration made a bold move of engagement with Beijing. Indirectly, this eased the potential relations between Israel and China. Those were initially secret ones. Clandestine military exchanges started in the second half of the seventies, following contacts between Chinese and Israeli officials at the Paris Air Show of 1975.[29]

For a long time, Israel provided China with technology in the fields of agriculture, solar energy, electronics, construction, and weapons systems. Then the end of the Cold War saw a nascent rapprochement between the two countries in this latter domain. It had a strategic dimension: Israel decided to stop its arms sales to the province of Taiwan while China promised not to deliver M-9 ballistic missiles to Syria.[30]

The Chinese–Israeli military exchanges started becoming an issue in the nineties when Israel had become the second supplier, after Russia, of military aviation technology to China. In contrast to the periphery of the Cold War, the US

were not consulted by the Israelis with regards to their China policy. There was no Israeli attempt to turn their ties with China into an asset for the US like it had been done in the fifties for Turkey and Iran.

The American intelligence community first raised the awareness of US government in the early nineties. In 1993, James Woolsey, then Director of Central Intelligence argued in front of the US Senate that Israel had been selling arms to China for years.[31] That same year, a CIA report on the proliferation of advanced military technology said that Israeli sales to China in that field "may be several billion dollars."[32] The initial reaction from Israeli officials was to deny the claim from the American intelligence agency. Ruth Yaron, the spokeswoman at the Israeli Embassy in Washington at that time, declared to the *New York Times*, that "Israel adheres to all of its commitments to the United States with regard to its relationship with China."[33]

In 1999, a classified report from the Defense Intelligence Agency raised the issue of Israel being suspected of sharing restricted US weapons technology with China related to a battlefield laser gun. US contractors working on technologies sold to the Israelis had witnessed the presence of Chinese technicians during specific visits.[34] In 2000, Israel decided, after a public dispute with the US government, to cancel a previous deal with China that included the sale of the Phalcon Airborne Early Warning and Control platform, considered by military experts to be among the most advanced technology in the field. The prospects of this sale had triggered a major uproar in Washington as the planners from the US Department of Defense believed that the platform to be sold by the Israelis would have been likely used against US-backed Taiwan, and as a consequence, would have put at risk US troops which might intervene in the Strait to oppose a Chinese assault. Eventually, Israel paid the Chinese $319 million as compensation for the cancellation of the transaction.[35]

Moreover, the Bush administration considered Israel's arms sales to China ill-advised because of China's role as the main provider of armament and nuclear technology to Pakistan and Iran. It was only in December 2004 that this Israeli policy was curtailed when the Bush administration objected to the Israeli government's decision to repair and upgrade an unmanned aerial vehicle, Harpy, previously sold to China. Harpy was a 500 km-range delta-wing lethal UAV able to suppress hostile surface-to-air missiles and radars. Oddly, Harpy UAVs included no US technology and had been already sold by the Israelis to the Chinese in the 1990s.

By the end of that decade, Israel was said to have sold about a hundred of the vehicles. The US government of Bill Clinton had been informed of the sales and did not object. Moreover, the deal amounting to $70 million was not even considered by Israeli arms sellers as a major contract.[36] The crisis only started in the summer of 2002 when the *Washington Times* reported that Harpy UAVs had been identified by US intelligence agencies in the southern Fujian province opposite Taiwan.[37] In other words, the Israelis were now seen as selling weapons to China that could be used against the US forces in the case of an invasion of Taiwan. Following this revelation, Israel officially agreed to a request from the

Bush administration to suspend all its arms sales in January 2003. But this was not the end. A year later, the Chinese asked the Israelis for an upgrading of the Harpys.

Till this day, the details of the deal remain classified but it seems likely that the US government feared the upgrade would have included new technologies including ones that were built under the framework of US–Israeli military cooperation. This time, the White House conveyed its strongest opposition to the developments and threatened the Israeli government to impose severe restrictions on future Israeli sales to Beijing.[38] The Israelis complied with the American demand.

Despite this major crisis, Israeli–Chinese trade relations kept expanding in other domains. Bilateral trade volume increased "almost 200 times" between 1992 and 2012 and includes areas such as science and technology, education, culture, arts, tourism, and academia.[39] In 2014, according to Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics, for the first time, Israel imported more goods from China than from the US.[40] As of 2015, the volume of annual trade was over $11 billion making China Israel's second largest trading partner after the US.[41] Today, officials from both countries frequently praise the relation. Gao Yanping, China's Ambassador to Israel, declared in 2014 "Our relations are shining with new luster in the new era," while Prime Minister Netanyahu stated during a visit to Beijing that "China is a global economic power and Israel is a global center of R&D, and I think we can complement each other to secure the market of tomorrow."[42]

However, the resumption of military cooperation – and in particular arms trade – remains an extremely sensitive issue. There have been mutual visits of representatives of ministries of defense from both countries. Noticeably, Chen Bingde, the Chief of Staff of the People's Liberation Army, visited Israel for the first time ever during a four-day trip in August 2011. Later, both Israel's former Chief of Staff Benny Gantz and the head of Military Intelligence Aviv Kochavi travelled to Beijing.[43] But Israeli officials seem well aware of US potential retaliation if a new crisis over arms sales would occur. As the US signaled its "pivot" to Asia under the presidency of Barack Obama and strengthened its ties with Asian partners (namely Japan, Australia, South Korea, and Vietnam) that eye with great concern the increased military ambitions of China, a crisis like the Harpys case in 2002–2004 could severely damage US–Israeli relations.

Like India, China does not take into consideration Israel's security agenda when it comes to its own Middle East policy, in particular regarding its relation with Iran. China is indeed a major commercial and political partner of Iran. Cooperation in the technological field is extensive and regular exchange visits of leaders from both countries evidence their proximity. Moreover, the Iranian ballistic program benefited from China, although this support has diminished since the nuclear crisis started in the 2000s.[44]

In the end, Israel–China relations appear more likely to focus on economic exchanges than on security cooperation. The balancing factor was non-existent on both sides. China recognized Israel in the context of its diplomatic quest for post-Cold War legitimacy while Israel saw it as a way to diversify its partnership from traditional Western powers. The past arms sales were more business-driven

than the result of a carefully crafted strategy and the fierce reactions from the Bush administration have led to a more cautious approach from the authorities in Jerusalem since then.

Some observers argue that this did not entirely stop the military exchanges. Muhamad Olimat, Assistant Professor of international relations at Khalifa University in the United Arab Emirates, wrote that "since 2003, their military co-operation has become discreet, making it difficult for any data mining to find reliable statistics on Israeli military transfer to China."[45] There are reasons to believe that this military co-operation, if existent at all, is extremely modest and does not go beyond the mutual visits. Additionally, as Chinese defense industries start increasing their indigenous expertise, they are less inclined to look for Israeli technologies.

Surely the Israeli officials seem to appreciate Chinese dispassionate views on Middle East issues. Revealingly, Minister of Economy Naftali Benett, remarked during a trip to Beijing and Shanghai in 2013:

> In all the 20 meetings we held, not once were we asked about the Arabs, or about the Palestinians, or about any occupation or anything else. All [the Chinese] care about is Israeli high-tech, Israeli innovations, how we can bring these technologies here.[46]

Consequently, if India is perceived by the Israeli strategic community as a potential ally, the relation with China is more driven by opportunism: as the rising new global power, China is seen as a future player in the Middle East that needs to be engaged with. This is why it can be rather characterized as a hedging strategy than a balancing strategy. Regarding its mention as part of the new periphery doctrine, it only corresponds to Israel's search for partners out of the Middle East and for public legitimacy. It does not aim to counter a particular threat that would be shared by both sides and furthermore, it does not involve the US like the old approach prescribed.

Israel's courting of the Gulf Arab monarchies

The alleged relations between Israel and Gulf states have been the topic of heated, and obviously highly sensitive, debates. The shared perception by Israel and Gulf States of Iran as an existential threat suggested a window of opportunity for cooperation. For instance, there have been rumors – not verified – that Saudi and Israeli intelligence representatives have met to discuss coordination over a military campaign against Iranian nuclear plants.[47]

According to a diplomatic cable issued by the US Embassy in Tel Aviv in March 2009, the Deputy Director General for the Middle East at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Yacov Hadas, briefed the Political Counsellor of the American Embassy on Israel's relations with Gulf States. These ties are described in the document as "a function of the Gulf Arabs' fear of Iran, but also as due to the Arabs' belief in Israeli influence in Washington." It is said that "while the

Omanis are generally correct in their dealings with Israel, they appear not to recognize the seriousness of the threat from Iran." Hadas is believed to have said "the Gulf Arabs feel that the US does not listen to them and therefore sometimes try to pass messages through Israel."[48]

Theoretically, Israel's attempt to engage with the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council would be the closest case for a new periphery strategy. The logic would be the following one: Israel and the Arab monarchies in the Gulf share similar concerns over Iran's regional ambitions. The "Iranian threat" has become such a fixation for policymakers in the Gulf that it can be characterized as a matrix through which all the troubles in the Gulf (discontent in Bahrain, insurgency in Yemen) can be analyzed. According to the US State Department cables leaked on the Wikileaks website, Saudi King Abdullah and Bahrain's King Hamed Ibn Isa Al Khalifa have repeatedly advocated a US pre-emptive strike against the nuclear sites.[49] The case of Saudi Arabia attracts the most attention, as the rivalry between the regimes in Riyadh and Tehran is the most severe in the region.

However, having a common enemy does not automatically mean the Israelis and the Gulf rulers are to become allies or occasional partners. During the era of the first periphery, Gulf monarchies also looked at Nasser's dreams of Arab grandeur with concerns. In particular, Saudi Arabia, a conservative regime, feared the pan-Arabist revolutionary rhetoric and offered refuge to the persecuted Muslim brothers. However, this did not lead to a rapprochement with Israel. Gulf kingdoms supported Palestinian organizations and declared the oil embargo of 1973 as a retaliatory measure for Western support to Israel during the October war. For decades, Gulf kingdoms had run Israel boycott offices and anti-Semitic analysis and cartoons are still frequent elements in local media outlets. The boycott meant an embargo on trade between Gulf-based companies and Israel. Telephone calls to Israel were blocked, same with websites with an Israeli suffix.

The Oslo peace process of the nineties barely changed the mindset of Gulf decision-makers. As the process collapsed in the midst of the second Intifada, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia – by then Crown Prince – proposed a comprehensive peace initiative. An ambitious plan, Abdullah's initiative aimed to end the Arab–Israeli conflict and implied the normalization of relations between Israel and the entire Arab region. The Arab League later endorsed the Saudi plan but failed to implement it as the security environment in the region kept deteriorating. Still, the initiative paved the way in the Gulf for the acceptance of Israel's existence. This is how, according to Yoel Guzansky, the Gulf region became during the 2003–2011 period, the third Middle East market for Israel exports (after Palestinian territories and Turkey).[50]

In 2005, Bahrain became the first country in the peninsula that chose to shut down its boycott office. It did not engender the discontent observers were expecting among the population. According to Wikileaks, the Bahraini King later instructed that official statements remove the traditional depiction of Israel as "the Zionist entity." Was this change of attitude the result of a common view

on the Iranian threat? In other words, could we see this appeasement on the anti-Zionist rhetoric as a move to align Bahrain on the Israeli side against Iran? The diplomatic cable dated February 15, 2005 describes a meeting between US Ambassador William Monroe and King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa. The latter "revealed that Bahrain already has contacts with Israel at the intelligence/ security level (i.e. with Mossad) and indicated that Bahrain will be willing to move forward in other areas."[51]

This revelation put the Bahraini royal court in a delicate situation. No confirmation of the information was ever given and some raised doubts about the veracity of the statement. Interviewed by the *Washington Times*, Adel al Moawda, second deputy chairman of Bahrain's Representative Council, argued that the author of the cable wrongly assumed Israeli–Bahraini exchanges: "We know some Americans are Jews and maybe they are in the secret police in America – people might consider them as part of the Mossad – so information can get scattered here and there."[52] The embarrassment from the Bahraini regime regarding such disclosure can also be understood by the social fabric of the country: although the royal family and the key government bodies are from Sunni confession, the vast majority of Bahraini citizens are Shia. Therefore, the authorities in Manama always suspected that Iran would interfere in local politics and social mobilizations but expressing public support to Israel could also cause discontent among the local population.[53] As the country has faced a protracted domestic crisis since 2011, the issue of establishing relations with Israel seems unlikely to resurface on the agenda.

Another country in the Gulf that has been cautiously reviewing its policy toward Israel is the United Arab Emirates. The first reason for this evolution was not a strategic one but a business one. With the spectacular growth of Dubai as a financial hub in the Middle East, there have been reports of Israeli businessmen traveling to Dubai – usually using a passport from another country.[54] By the late 2000s, there seemed to be an evolution of mentalities in the Emirates vis-à-vis Israel. In 2008, the Emirati influential columnist Sultan Al Qassemi published an article for *The Nation* titled "Welcoming Our Long-gone Neighbors" and later reprinted by *Haaretz*. In a rather unusual fashion, the piece described the historic ties between Arabs and Jews. "It wasn't all bad blood between the Arabs and the Jews; in fact, there were stories of heroism that have gone unreported and unnoticed in the Arab media" wrote Al Qassemi.[55] The author refrained from any statement that could call for the normalization of relations with Israel and did not fall into a naïve vision of Israel–Arab relations. But he did offer a critical look at Arab regimes and the Palestinian cause: "no one has been more cruel and violent to Arabs, more exploitive of the Palestinians and more manipulative of their cause than Arabs themselves."[56] Such an opinion piece coming from a member of the ruling family in Sharjah and a well-connected writer in the UAE was an indication that the mindset among local elites was evolving.

According to a US diplomatic cable revealed by Wikileaks, "Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdallah has developed good personal relations with Foreign Minister Livni, but the Emiratis are 'not ready to do publicly what they say in private'."[57]

A year after, on January 16, 2010, Uzi Landau Infrastructure Minister was the first Israeli Minister to visit the UAE to attend a conference convened by the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) whose headquarters are located in Abu Dhabi. Nevertheless, three days later, a failed intelligence operation prompted a diplomatic scandal. The killing of a Hamas operative, Mahmoud al Mabhouh, in his hotel room in Dubai, triggered an international crisis as Emirati authorities believed that the 26 suspects identified were Mossad agents using foreign passports to enter the country.[58] Israeli authorities neither denied nor confirmed their involvement but, as a consequence, Dubai police declared it would tighten the restrictions against the entry of Israeli citizens holding two passports, although it was not clear at that time how it would technically implement such security measure.

Despite the tensions, IRENA became the entry point for Israeli diplomats in the UAE. In late November 2015, *Haaretz* claimed that Israel had been working to open a diplomatic mission in Abu Dhabi, officially accredited to IRENA. The journalist Barak Ravid reported that exchanges over an Israeli delegation to IRENA had been undergoing since the foundation of the international organization in 2009. In fact, it was one concession made by the Emiratis to be able to host the world headquarters of IRENA, instead of Germany as it was initially planned.[59]

One could speculate on the common concerns that would lead Israeli and Emirati officials to gather. Both countries see Iran as their existential threat. While Israeli leaders, such as Benjamin Netanyahu, believe Iranian ballistic missiles are assembled to target Israel, the Emirati officials express concerns over the fact that this arsenal puts their entire territory in the range of Iranian weapons. Both the Israelis and the Emiratis expressed concerns over Iranian support to non-state actors in the region (Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen). Moreover, both countries seem to perceive themselves as small states facing superior enemies. Interestingly, General James Mattis, who ran the US Central Command from 2010 to 2013, called the UAE "Little Sparta,"[60] a qualification that may recall the "David and Goliath" narrative – or Sucharov's "defensive warrior" narrative[61] – which had been used following the birth of Israel. Finally, both countries have a close military cooperation with the US armed forces, making the potential ties an asset for the US government.

Nevertheless, this remains speculative: Emirati authorities made clear that the prolongation of the Israel–Palestine conflict would forbid any move toward rapprochement if not normalization. A traditionally discreet country when it comes to its foreign policy, the UAE is unlikely to change its position.[62] In the current regional environment, with the peace process in a deadlock, there is no incentive to build proper diplomatic relations.

Qatar, for a short period of time, was the closest Gulf monarchy to consider full normalization of its relations with Israel. In 1996, an Israeli trade representation office was opened in Doha. It was the result of a new ambitious foreign policy launched by Shaikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani since he took power in 1995, following a palace coup that removed his father from the throne. Although

there was much speculation about a rapprochement under the premiership of Shimon Peres, the election of Binyamin Netanyahu in June 1996 put an end to the momentum. Qatari officials condemned Israeli military policies in the Palestinian territories but at the same time allowed Israeli participation in the MENA Economic Conference convened in Doha in 1997. The Qatari decision was disapproved by the other Gulf kingdoms, which perceived it as a dangerous move. Although Qatari authorities defended the invitation in the name of their sovereignty, they soon changed as it became apparent that the Oslo peace process was falling apart.

In September 1998, Israeli physicians invited to a medical conference in Doha were not allowed to enter the country. At the same time, the Crown Prince Shaykh Jasim bin Hamad established the "permanent Qatari Committee to support Jerusalem" in an explicit attempt to restore the Emirate's image in the Arab world.[63] The second Intifada in 2000 led to local anti-Israel demonstrations. Qatar's record as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 2006 included condemnations of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians and the dispro-portionate scale of Israel's military intervention in the summer against Hezbollah in Lebanon. Additionally, Qatar entertained close ties with Palestinian Hamas, providing the organization with financial aid in Gaza suspected to be used for funding Hamas' military wing.

To complicate things a bit more, Qatar has also maintained relations with Iran despite the growing tensions between Tehran and Gulf capitals. Against that backdrop, Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni was invited to Doha in 2008 to deliver a keynote speech at the Doha Forum on Democracy, Development and Free Trade. Such invitation provoked inflammatory comments in Arab news-papers – in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere – about Qatar's accommodation with Israel. Livni's speech was a typical Israeli "periphery" message. She aimed to defuse the apprehension vis-à-vis cooperation with Israel by underlining a common threat, namely Iran: "Israel is no longer the enemy; a situation has been created in which the threat is posed by Iran and extremist elements such as Hamas and Hezbollah."[64] As Qatar's foreign policy was by then trying to avoid getting trapped in zero-sum games, Livni's message did not really reach the audience. Likewise, in 2015, Israel's deputy minister for regional cooperation justified Israel's odd permission granted to Qatar to fund Hamas in Gaza by arguing that "most of these countries are afraid from the future with Iran, so we have a chance, now, to make the relationship better."[65]

However, the war in Gaza, starting in December 2008, damaged Israeli expectations in Doha. Following the conflict, the Emir of Qatar announced the freezing of commercial exchanges with Israel and the closing of the trade office. After the events, relations were not resumed despite repeated Israeli attempts. In the end, Qatar's brief engagement with Israel did not fit into the logic of the peri-phery. It was not meant to antagonize the Iranians or Arab organizations, such as Hamas, but rather it was the result of Qatar's broad foreign policy strategy at that time.[66] For the Israeli scholar Uzi Rabi, to understand the Israeli policy of Qatar, we need to disregard the "traditional prism of the Arab–Israeli conflict"

and to focus on "the broader Qatari foreign policy agenda […] maintaining relations with Israel has enabled Qatar to assert its independence in the Arab arena and compete as an emerging regional political power."[67]

Kuwait might be the country on the Peninsula that has been the most reticent about engagement with Israel. Like the others, Kuwait does not recognize Israel and its laws ban Israeli products and companies. Contrary to its GCC partners, Kuwaiti officials avoided political or security talks between the two countries. It boycotted the IRENA conference in Abu Dhabi in January 2014 because of Israel's attendance.[68] Such a decision reflected differences between Kuwait and the UAE. The Kuwaiti authorities argued that "the decision comes in line with Kuwait's commitment to boycott all forms of interaction with the Zionist regime" while Anwar Mohammad Gargash, UAE Minister of state for Foreign Affairs, wrote, "the UAE has been able, through a delicate balance, to differentiate between Israel's membership in Irena and the normalization of bilateral ties which Israel has been seeking."[69]

In other words, Kuwait and the UAE do not share the same appreciation of what constitutes "normalization." This Kuwaiti policy does not go without internal oppositions. In 2013, parliamentarian Nabil Al Fadhl, considered to be a liberal within Kuwait's political system, told to the local TV station Al Adala that:

> If the security of Kuwait requires the purchase of Israeli equipment, I will do so, and I will love the Israelis for it. It is permitted to deal with anyone for the sake of Kuwait's security […] I am willing to buy equipment from Israel to defend my country against its Arab and Muslim neighbors.[70]

Al Fadhl did not stop there. As he suggested in early 2015, he prepared a motion to the Kuwaiti parliament to normalize relations with Israel.[71]

In the end, the motion was not submitted but it stirred a significant controversy in the Kuwaiti polity. In particular, it occurred approximately at the same time as the company Kuwait Airways found itself in an international crisis involving the US and Israel. In September 2015, the US Department of Transportation condemned the company for discriminating against customers holding an Israeli passport. In that specific case, an Israeli passenger flying from New York to London was refused on board by Kuwait Airways. The American officials denounced the measure as illegal. Namrata Kolachalam, spokeswoman for the US Department of Transportation, specified that "an airline does not have the right to refuse to sell tickets to and transport a person between the U.S. and any third country where they are allowed to disembark based on the laws of that country."[72] The response from Kuwait Airways was twofold. First, it sent a letter with a very explicit message:

> Kuwait and Israel are in a state of war, lack diplomatic relations and the State of Kuwait does not and cannot recognize Israeli passports as legal documents. Kuwait Airways Corporation is wholly owned by the

Government of Kuwait and, as such, can be viewed as an instrument of the government in its international commerce and foreign policy.[73]

Second, Kuwaiti authorities decided to stop operating flights between New York and London in January 2016 as a way to avoid additional trouble.[74] In that perspective, it is unlikely to witness any major shift in the short term in the state of Israel–Kuwait relations.

The Sultanate of Oman started reviewing its policy vis-à-vis Israel in the nineties. In 1994, Israel's Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin visited Muscat and met with the Sultan Qaboos. A year later, Shimon Peres, who replaced Rabin after his assassination, welcomed the Omani foreign minister Yusuf Ibn Alawi in Jerusalem. In 1996, Israel opened a trade mission in Oman. These first steps stumbled as the second Intifada erupted in 2000. As a result Oman closed the Israel Trade Representation Office, and diplomatic relations have been suspended since then. There have been occasional speculations on the resumption of bilateral exchanges but as of today, nothing significant had been approved officially by both sides.[75] Omani authorities demanded Israel's freeze of its settlements in Palestinian territories before reconsidering diplomatic relations. Additionally, because of its rather neutral position in the Gulf regarding Iran, Oman is unlikely to be interested by a rapprochement with Israel which would be perceived negatively in Tehran.

Finally, the Israelis have also been trying to establish ties with the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia's position in the Arab and Muslim World as the custodian of the two holy sites in Islam, puts its rulers in an extremely delicate position regarding exchanges with Israel. The late King Abdullah had offered a major peace proposal in 2002 that included full normalization of relations between Israel and Arab countries, but it was not followed through, in part due to the unfolding of the second Intifada.

Back in 2009, Wikileaks revealed US diplomatic cables that described the Israeli–Saudi relation as one based primarily on intelligence and military cooperation. It noted that "it was clear from Hadas' remarks that Israel's channel to Saudi Arabia does not run through the Foreign Ministry." The former head of the Mossad, Meir Dagan, was thought to be behind the secret dialogue between Israel and Saudi Arabia. That same year, Israeli authorities denied the claims made by a British newspaper that Saudi Arabia had authorized the IDF to use its airspace in the scenario of an air campaign against Iran.[76] But surprising external observers, the Israelis and Saudis confirmed publicly their meetings in June 2015, when Anwar Eshki, a former Saudi general and ambassador to the US, and Dore Gold, former Israeli ambassador to the UN, met for an event convened by the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington. In front of the American audience, they both acknowledged the fact that their countries have been organizing a series of five meetings during the last two years to discuss the Iranian issue. Gold concluded by saying "We're both allies of the United States and I hope this is the beginning of more discussion about our common strategic problems."[77]

In light of this regional environment, the Israeli Foreign Ministry announced in July 2013, it had opened a Twitter account "dedicated to promoting dialogue with the people of the GCC region."[78] It has been described by the Israeli government as a "virtual embassy" to the six members of the GCC and is supervised by the director of digital diplomacy at the Israeli ministry. Talking about this innovative decision, Yigal Palmor, spokesman for the ministry, conceded, "Of course we recognize the political circumstances prevailing in this part of the region and other parts of it, and that will not be an easy task to resolve, but you have to start somewhere and show your goodwill."[79] However, if the number of Twitter followers is a possible metric of success for digital diplomacy, the account "Israel in the GCC" is rather low, with only 2135 as of February 2016. In comparison, the account of the US Embassy in Abu Dhabi has 14 000 followers.

In the end, the depiction of Israel–Gulf relations revealed by Wikileaks may reflect the reality of asymmetrical expectations on both sides. While the Israelis are outspoken about the potential rapprochement, Gulf leaders regularly dismiss it. Although the Israeli representatives appear upbeat from the description of the meeting in the diplomatic cable, the American official authoring the cable reminds us that "Arabs say that progress on the Palestinian track would make it easier for them to publicly engage Israel."[80] Likewise, in a short piece for the Tel-Aviv-based Institute for National Security Studies, Udi Dekel and Yoel Guzansky observe that for Gulf States:

> the cost of open relations with Israel at this time may be higher than the benefit […] The Arab monarchies in the Gulf are currently benefiting from the fact that covert, unofficial relations allow them to enjoy the advantages of ties with Israel without having to pay a price in public opinion.[81]

All in all, Israel's engagement with Gulf monarchies remained a limited enterprise, which does not appear sufficient enough to be called a partnership. There are surely common security and economic interests that stakeholders acknowledge, but given the contemporary security environment in the Middle East, Gulf rulers have no incentive to normalize their ties with Israel.

Applying the logic of the periphery to the world?

At first glance, all the bilateral relations discussed here and those that have been mentioned as part of a "periphery 2.0" appear disconnected. The Indians, the Chinese or the Gulf monarchies hardly share commonalities in their strategic agendas. India and China maintain diplomatic and economic relations with Iran. Even the countries that may share Israel's concerns regarding the Iranian regime – in particular the Gulf kingdoms – are not inclined toward cooperating with Israel as a way to explicitly counter a common threat.

If one compares these relations with the alliance from the fifties, the zero-sum game is barely sustainable within this new setting. We have seen how Israel's

arms sales policy in Asia indiscriminately targeted competing regional powers like India and China. On the other hand, India and China did not consider their exchanges with the Israelis as an obstacle for their Iranian policies. In the Gulf, Israel's enterprise has produced mixed results. Although there was a shared security challenge – namely Iran and its regional allies – Gulf monarchies remained for the most part cautious. If they chose to engage, they opted for clandestine or discreet exchanges, increasing secrecy at a level that was not reached during the first era of the periphery alliance. However, they also refused to get trapped into Israel's zero-sum game. For instance, they kept backing and financing Palestinian organizations, like Qatar's support to Hamas, which are still engaged in open confrontation with Israel.

Yet the list of potential members of the new periphery alliance seems endless. In his book, Yossi Alpher also alludes to Israel's policy in the Horn of Africa and its ties with Uganda, and Kenya. He speculates on Israeli–Morocco relations and looks at the Berber minority as a possible partner in North Africa. Alpher even suggests that "two European states north of Turkey – Bulgaria and Romania" are worth considering.[82]

Nevertheless, of all these countries none would acknowledge that its relation with Israel can be described as an alliance. As a result, the concept has less to do with the reality of these bilateral developments than with the expectations Israeli policymakers and thinkers have for them and the narrative they build upon it.

This leads to the most significant evolution of the concept itself: geographically, the periphery is no longer describing a clear area. If we put all the named potential allies together on a map, it gives us a picture with no geostrategic meaning, except that the periphery seems to now extend far beyond the Middle East. A geographic representation of the on-going discussion only reflects one key intellectual flaw about the concept: it has become a catch-all idea. Although there was a clear meaning and intention behind the alliance of the fifties, its renaissance seemed to be superficial. It downplayed the importance of military cooperation and intelligence sharing. It neglected the significance of acknowledging common security challenges to promote only the idea that Israel was finding itself new allies. Sometimes, it appeared as if this "periphery 2.0" was not only an act in front of enemies or competitors, but also a show of defiance against traditional allies of Israel, in particular the US, as the public relations between Washington and Jerusalem deteriorated, in particular during the period of Netanyahu's premiership and Obama's presidency.[83] If the historical periphery policy was meant to strengthen the US–Israeli ties by turning the latter into a strategic asset for the former, the new partnerships were now perceived as ways to hedge against US retreat from the Middle East. Overall, because none of these new countries are close allies, this new periphery was more about Israeli fears of being left alone facing security challenges than about these challenges themselves.

Notes

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82 Yossi Alpher, *Periphery*, op. cit., p. 106.

83 Jeffrey Goldberg, "The Crisis in US–Israel Relations is Officially Here," *The Atlantic*, October 28, 2014.

Conclusion

Ideas rarely survive in their purest form in the realm of public policies. Political science has shown that numerous factors compete to alter them: personal interests, bureaucratic struggles, and their ramifications (budgetary constraints, legal framework, and public opinion pressures) tend to challenge the implementation of grand strategies whose ambitious goals do not match the reality on the ground. In his emblematic article titled "Is Strategy an Illusion?" Richard Betts pointed out that "effective strategy is often an illusion because what happens in the gap between policy objectives and war outcomes is too complex and unpredictable to be manipulated to a specified end."[1]

The difficulty of government bureaucracies to conduct a strategy was frequently evoked by our numerous interviews in Israel. Although there was a definite interest from policymakers to discuss strategies, it frequently sounded like a mundane exchange with no direct connection to their daily work. Added to that, Israelis tend to look skeptically at long-term plans and strategies. As one diplomat told the author sarcastically, "we don't even know if Israel will still exist in six months so why should we design a strategy for the next 20 years?!"[2]

Certainly, grand strategies are not applicable remedies to policy issues but they do reflect preferences within the decision-making world. They indicate norms and assumptions. In modern history, scholars, pundits and practitioners have constantly built new foreign policy concepts but they only a few lasted for years, not to say for decades. The idea of "containment," famously formulated by George Kennan in 1947, remains a classic and enduring foreign policy concept[3] that inspired several American presidents during the Cold War and is even today resurfacing occasionally, for instance when it comes to US policy vis-à-vis China.[4] But there have been numerous cases where big ideas never materialized, or did only for a very short period. Israel's old peripheral ally, Turkey, had, for instance, built its foreign policy in the 2000s based upon Davutoğlu's concept of zero problems with neighbors but as we covered earlier, it lasted no more than a couple of years as Turkish relations with Israel deteriorated and the Syrian war triggered tensions between Ankara and the regime of Bashar al Assad. Eventually, Davutoğlu's approach led to what observers sarcastically called a "zero-friend" policy.[5] Because of this competition of ideas and their rapid obsolescence, Colin Gray compared the strategic debate to the fashion industry.[6]

It is for this very reason that the endurance of the periphery idea in Israel's foreign policy is a remarkable phenomenon. True, the implementation of the project was limited. The ambitious regional alliance that Ben-Gurion, Shiloah and Uziel had dreamt of in the fifties never really materialized. The trilateral exchanges between the Israelis, the Iranians and the Turks were constrained and did not last long. All along they stumbled over the sensitivity and caution of leaders who avoided, as much as possible, reaching the level of full normalization. Pressures from Arab powers, in particular Egypt, played a significant role several times (in particular after the Suez War in 1956, and after the 1967 War) to disrupt the partnership. Eventually, regime changes in Iran and Ethiopia dismantled the bilateral relations, while the arrival of the AKP in Turkey severely damaged the ties between Jerusalem and Ankara. One could therefore argue that if both external and internal elements found a way to erode the alliance, it is probably because the alliance itself never really existed.

Still, against all odds, the concept survived and resurfaced in earnest over the last years. The security environment had greatly evolved. The threat of pan-Arabism was long gone; two Arab neighbors (Egypt and Jordan) had recognized *de jure* Israel – respectively in 1979 and 1994. A peace process was launched with a newly built Palestinian Authority that was to become Israel's neighboring partner. Even the Arab hostile powers such as Saddam Hussein's Iraq and the Assad regime in Syria had declined. The first was toppled by the US-led invasion in 2003 while the latter dragged itself into a civil war following the 2011 upheavals. As a result, the threat coming from an Arab invasion disappeared from Israel's military contingency planning. In fact, the new challenges identified were coming from the past periphery. While Israel–Turkey relations became erratic and sometimes suspended, Iran had become the primary security concern, an "existential threat" for some pundits.

Against that backdrop, the new periphery, the "periphery 2.0," had a similar philosophy but different objectives. The new periphery targeted new partners, more diverse and further away from Israel's geostrategic location. Under these circumstances, Israel reinforced its cooperation with Azerbaijan to balance against the threats coming from Iran. It rapidly saw the emergence of South Sudan as a strategic opportunity to engage with an Arab non-Muslim country. Meanwhile, Israel explicitly improved its relations with Greece to counter Turkey's rising enmity toward Jerusalem. Moreover, Israel also widened the geographical scope of the "periphery" with what appears to be its look-east policy. It has increasingly invested in its relations with India since the end of Cold War and even more since the mid-2000s. With regards to China, despite a major crisis with the US over Israeli arms sales to Beijing in the early 2000s, both countries have become close trade partners. Israeli planners even attempted to engage with Gulf Arab monarchies, opening in the case of Qatar a trade office in Doha.

Nevertheless, the results of this new engagement, *tous azimuts*, have been mixed at best. Many of the new "allies" remain weak partners politically, economically or militarily. Greece faced tremendous financial pressures following

the 2009 debt crisis, Azerbaijan's oil wealth started decreasing and South Sudan has been entangled in a civil war since its birth. Meanwhile, Israel's Asian policy has no profound strategic dimension as it developed ties with countries that compete between each other. Finally, although Israel's courting strategy with Gulf Arab monarchies may at first remind the pattern of its ties with Turkey and Iran in the fifties – external balancing against a common threat through discreet and allegedly clandestine ties – its reality has been exaggerated and appears to be more think tank speculation than solid policy.

From that perspective, one could easily argue that the weaknesses and short-comings visible with the first periphery alliance are exacerbated with the new one. But for scholarship, what matters is not only if and how a strategy works, but rather why. Despite all the known limitations of the periphery concept, the Israeli national security establishment still looks at it as one driver for its foreign policy. That is because the periphery was from the outset a fundamental matrix of Israel's national security strategy.

Throughout my study, I showed that the idea of the periphery was ingrained in the mindset of the founders of the State. It was not simply a reaction to Israel's regional challenges but rather the combination of geopolitics, ideas and bureaucratic interests. Its premise of an endless struggle against the hostility from its neighbors was not the result of years of conflict after the birth of Israel in 1948, it was already visible in the Zionist thinking of Jabotinsky in the thirties. Just like containment tells us about American self-perception of insulation and ability to keep threats at distance, the periphery doctrine reflected the pessimistic world view of Israeli founders, their suspicion for public and overt diplomacy. But beyond the influence of Zionist thinking, for the political scientist, the endurance of the periphery concept can be understood as evidence for the case that Israel, maybe more than any other State, behaves according to the principles of the Realist school of International Relations.

As a result, the periphery doctrine and its implementation shed light on one rare case where ideas fueled the policy process. It allowed us to better understand the motivations behind very sensitive decisions – e.g. Israel's training of the Shah's secret services or Iraqi Kurds – and its unintended consequences – Israel's affiliation with the authoritarian rule of the Shah, more broadly its neglect for public diplomacy.

At the same time, when we look in retrospect at all the cases investigated for our research, Israel's quest for "normalization" appeared doomed to fail as it was systematically met with apprehension by the leaders of the other countries. The expression of "normalization" was very frequently used by diplomats and officers who have been, or are, involved in Israel's foreign policy toward all these countries. As Itamar Rabinovich explains in his book *The Lingering Conflict*, normalization was "cardinal to the original purpose of Zionism."[7] It meant the establishment of peaceful relations between Israel and each of the Arab countries and, moreover, the integration of Israel into a regional system. We touch here upon the eventual issue with the periphery: it was a short-term measure which, in the long term, prevented its initial purpose.

Like Jabotinsky's "iron wall," which was supposed to temporarily build Israel's defense before making arrangements with the Arabs, the periphery was not initially conceived as a lasting posture. In the periphery environment, secrecy was supposed to be a preliminary step but it became a permanent and convenient mode for leaders, who aimed to benefit from Israel's relations while not bearing the cost of Arab discontent. Therefore it turned a temporary tactic into a long-term strategy. For the political scientist, this puts into vivid perspective the intricate relation between policy and ideas.

Finally, as we contemplate the shaky and ever-changing relations between Israel and its past and present peripheral partners, we may ask: if foreign policy remains strictly secret, if it relies primarily on intelligence and military operators, does it really benefit the countries on the long term? It is a central question for both scholars and practitioners. In a country like Israel, whose very existence remains till this day the object of struggles, it has vital ramifications.

Notes

1 Richard K. Betts, "Is Strategy an Illusion?," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 2, Fall 2000, pp. 5–50, p. 5.
2 Interview with the author in Brussels, March 2012.
3 George Kennan, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs*, July 1947. Available at: www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/1947-07-01/sources-soviet-conduct. Accessed on March 2, 2016; on Kennan's legacy, see John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005.
4 For a detailed analysis of the China case, see Evan Resnik, "The Rebalance and the Dangers of America's Creeping Containment of China" in: Geoffrey Till (Ed.), *The Changing Maritime Scene in Asia: Rising Tensions and Future Strategic Stability*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, pp. 22–34.
5 See the critical analysis on Turkey's evolving policy: Piotr Zalewski, "How Turkey Went from 'Zero Problems' to Zero Friends," *Foreign Policy*, August 22, 2013. See http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/08/22/how-turkey-went-from-zero-problems-to-zero-friends/. Accessed on September 19, 2017.
6 Colin Gray, *Strategy for Chaos: Revolutions in Military Affairs and the Evidence of History*, London, Routledge, 2002, pp. 17–18.
7 Itamar Rabinovich, *The Lingering Conflict: Israel, the Arabs, and the Middle East 1948–2011*, Washington, Brookings Institution Press, 2011, p. 265.

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