3

Deterrence Comes of Age: 1957–1967

Operation Kadesh, the Israeli code name for the October 1956 Sinai campaign, was launched because of the Israeli perception of an unacceptable decline in the efficacy of the nation's deterrent. It was part of a larger maneuver involving the armies of Great Britain and France that, under the title Operation Muskateer, sought to recapture control of the Suez Canal for the West and, perhaps, to bring about the deposition of Nasser. Britain and France moved slowly, were not particularly successful on the battlefield, and succumbed quickly to U.S. pressure for an immediate halt to hostilities and an immediate withdrawal of all foreign forces from Egyptian territory. Israel, the junior partner in this trilateral action, brought about the collapse of the Egyptian army in the Sinai and in the Gaza Strip. In a matter of five days the Israeli army was in control of vast expanses of desert, three times the size of the Jewish state itself.[1]

The capitulation of the British and French to U.S. pressure turned the whole affair into an Egyptian victory. Nasser, whose army did not fight well, could claim that Egypt had single-handedly repelled the forces of two world empires. He could not hide the poor showing of his army in the Sinai peninsula. But he could lead himself, his people, the Arab world, and the emerging bloc of nonaligned nations to believe that the defeat in the battle for the Sinai was not due to Israel's superior battlefield performance, but had occurred only because of the undeniable fact that Egypt was primarily preoccupied with the (then) pending British and French landing.

The British–French decision to yield to U.S. pressure also undercut Israel's position. If these two leading Western powers could hold their own against the United States (the Soviet Union's threatening noises did not unduly trouble anyone, since the Soviets were then preoccupied with a rebellion in Hungary and Poland and had not yet deployed missiles capable of reaching London, Paris, or Tel Aviv), Israel's ability to stand up to U.S. pressures would be substantially strengthened, too. Conversely, having utterly given up the political struggle with the United States, Britain and France had placed Israel in the focus of U.S. attention, the main target for the frustration and fury of the Eisenhower administration.

Consequently, Israel was ultimately forced to withdraw from the Sinai and the Gaza Strip in exchange for little more than a tacit understanding that Egypt would agree to a unilateral demilitarization of their Sinai possessions. This agreement would be buttressed by the presence, on the Egyptian side of the border only, of a United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) as well as by a letter from the president of the United States to the prime minister of Israel. This note suggested, somewhat vaguely, that Israel would be free to take care of its interests and security if and when the Egyptians were to revert to the pre-Sinai campaign status quo ante.[2]

With grave forebodings Israel gave way, and by the beginning of 1957 the IDF was out of the Sinai and the Gaza Strip again, whereas Egyptian personnel had returned—contrary to all promises made to Israel—to the Gaza Strip. Nevertheless, in the final analysis the Sinai campaign gave Israel a great deal. It was followed by a decade of stability on the Egyptian–Israeli border. It created conditions in which the Negev, in particular Eilat, could develop. It reassured the Israelis about their ability to take care of their own security. Though the Jewish state was noisily branded as an aggressor and a party to an unsavory conspiracy, Israel's international standing improved spectacularly. Relations with the Western powers became far closer. Israel's efforts to establish its presence as an actor on the continent of Africa, in Asia, and in Latin America were highly successful. Immigration to the country ground to a half, but this created an opportunity for consolidation.[3]

Meanwhile, the Arab world, which prior to Operation Kadesh had appeared to be on the march toward union under Egyptian hegemony, was increasingly torn asunder by a "cold war" between the radical allies of the Soviets and the conservative, pro-Western monarchies. Egypt became bogged down in a hopeless war in the Yemen. Iraq had a Kurdish uprising on its hands and was at loggerheads with Kuwait, with the Saudis, with Syria, and with Jordan. The energies of both Syria and Iraq seemed to be sapped by successive coups and countercoups. As a result, not only Israel's Egyptian border but also its Jordanian and Lebanese borders became placid, at least in comparison to the Israeli experience during the 1949–56 period.[4]

Divided and preoccupied with their own internecine quarrels, the Arabs seemed (from the Israeli point of view) adequately impressed by the Jewish state's military prowess. There were, to be sure, two lingering reasons for concern—the quickened pace of the arms race and the continuous trouble on the Israeli–Syrian border. But even these potential sources of danger did not convince the Israelis that war was imminent or even likely, at least in the course of the 1960s. The rhetoric of political leaders continued to emphasize the ubiquitous external threat. But in terms of people's perceptions and of the government's own policies, the urgency and anxiety of the pre-1956 era had been replaced by a sense of routine.

Cast in strategic-political terms, this perception of Israel's situation during the 1957–67 decade implied that the nation's endeavor to cultivate effective deterrence had become an established success story. Generally speaking, deterrence seemed to have been proved a reliable foundation for national security. Specifically, it had been explicated, consolidated, explained, researched, exercised. The IDF, in this strategic package, was pictured as a gigantic harpoon, a powerful and pointed instrument of massive punishment. If called on to retaliate, it would exact from the Arabs an intolerable price. Its effectiveness as the mainstay of the deterrent, therefore, appeared to be beyond doubt. Meanwhile, it was becoming amply clear that the idea of a deterrent alliance was unworkable. Israel could forge beneficial relations with many states both in the Middle East and among the world's leading powers. But it could not—and many contended it should not—obtain a deterrent patronage.

To compensate for the absence of a reliable alliance and as a means of buttressing the retaliatory capabilities of the IDF, with its deliberate emphasis on decision in battle rather than on defense, Israel would have to fall back on a number of specified red lines, the crossing of which by the Arabs would be regarded as a deliberate act of hostility and would, therefore, lead to an instantaneous Israeli riposte. The Arabs should know, it was assumed, that if it ever came to that, Israel would not hesitate to act. But to preserve the element of surprise and to avoid friction with friendly powers and an acrimonious domestic debate, Israel should preserve an element of ambiguity in its force employment preferences. This, in brief, was the strategic package that evolved in the course of the 1957–67 decade. The processes and lessons that shaped it and the crisis in which it was subject to the test of reality form the topic of this chapter.

The New Order of Battle

Neither Operation Kadesh nor the political and strategic developments that followed it had a significant bearing on the Israeli solution to the problem of manpower allocation. The reserve system seemed to have conclusively proved its efficacy. The scores of thousands of civilians who in the years preceding the war had trained within the stringent conditions that a reserve system permitted—in particular, the limiting of training time to thirty days or so per calendar year—did not seem to have affected adversely the IDF's performance in battle. The logistical system, too, had withstood the demanding conditions of a short war. An army of civilians, whose only previous battle experience had been in a slow-moving, defensive war, revealed itself capable of fighting a brief, intensive war based on a decisive-victory concept.

Starting from this assumption, IDF planners had no reason to change the overall regular/reserve ratio, the call-up system, the depot system, or their

approach to the long-term peacetime training philosophy. Although the introduction of complex weapons systems made it imperative to enlarge the regular, professional core, especially in the IAF and in the armored corps (*Gyasot Hashiryon* or, for short, *HaGayis*), it is still true that between the 1956 and the 1967 wars the IDF remained, by and large, a reserve-based army along the lines of its organization in the immediate aftermath of the 1948 war. Indeed, if anything, the system seemed to be rapidly improving. The bulk of the reserves in the 1949–56 period had had very little systematic training. They were recruited hastily, trained briefly, and put into action. By contrast, the post–1956 IDF, especially the regulars but also increasingly the reserves, were recruited by the IDF and trained within an orderly training system. No longer a ragtag militia, it became a professional fighting force with good, standardized training; a solid, experienced officer corps; a rich folklore of interservice and interunit competition; reasonably standardized and professionally maintained equipment; a common set of clearly established procedures; and, despite its young age (as an institution), high morale nurtured by two successive victories.[5]

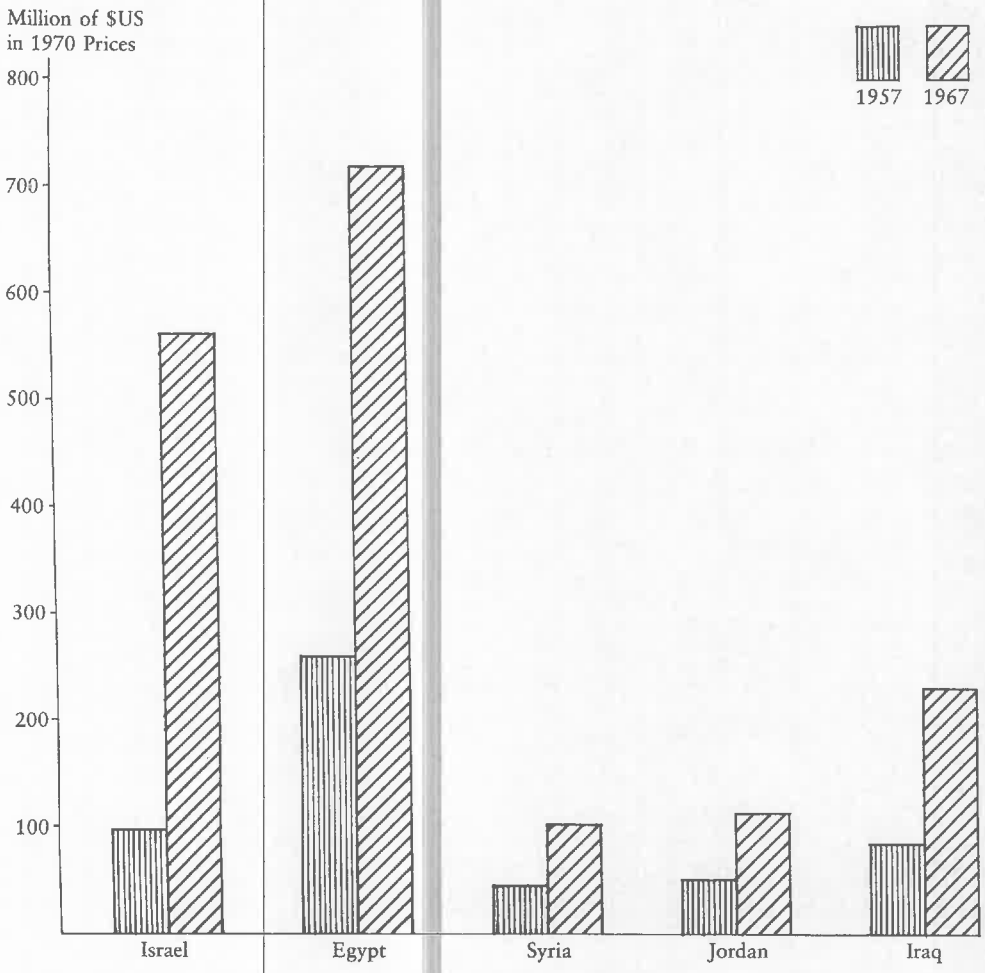
As a result of the impact of an accelerating arms race and of the battle experience of the previous years, this army rapidly changed its face in terms of its priorities, emphases, equipment, and doctrine. Wars in the Middle East, as probably elsewhere, too, tend to boost the arms race and carry it into new (and generally more dangerous and more complex) phases. After—or even in the course of—every round of hostilities, the adversaries hasten to replenish their depleted armories, both in the fear that otherwise the adversary will take advantage of their weakness and in the hope that procuring greater quantities of more sophisticated weapons will give them an advantage.

In this sense the 1956 Israeli–Egyptian encounter was no exception. Signaling by its very occurrence the final breakdown of the Western policy embodied in the Tripartite Declaration, the 1956 war was followed by a massive Egyptian effort to replenish stocks and, if possible, gain an edge over Israel. From the Israeli point of view, even parity with Egypt was unacceptable, let alone an Egyptian advantage. Israel started from the assumption that it had to have an army strong enough to obtain a decisive victory within a few days even if the Jewish state were attacked simultaneously by all the Arab states combined. Hence the Egyptian drive for strategic parity forced Israel to double its own efforts. In turn Israel increasingly became a menacing military reality from the point of view of every one of its neighbors, who—following the same maddening reasoning—had no logical alternative but to increase their own arms buildup still further. The Arab–Israeli arms race during this period, therefore, was of breathtaking proportions because of a critical structural feature: Israel sought deterrence through an equilibrium as if there were only two adversaries in the conflict system. But since Egypt, Syria, and to an extent Jordan all acted on a similar assumption (of a bilateral encounter between each one of them alone and the Jewish state), an Israeli lead could never really be either acheived or, indeed, maintained.

If from this perspective the Arab–Israeli arms race was of a compound variety, then inter-Arab relations turned it into a doubly compounded race. Egypt, for one, had adopted a vocation—namely, the search for a role of leadership in the Arab world. In pursuit of this goal, it had to be able to exhibit the largest military profile. Thus if Syria and Iraq bought arms in increasing quantities and of a growing sophistication, Egypt could not afford to lag behind. But the reverse was also true: if Egypt was willing and able to commit 50,000 troops to a war in the Yemen, it constituted a formidable menace to virtually any other force in the Middle East. Accordingly, Saudi Arabia had to arm itself to the teeth, Jordan could not afford to lag behind, and the vicious cycle of armament and counterarmament among the Arabs themselves—not to mention the Arab–Iranian arms race—added fuel to the overall Arab–Israeli arms race. Perhaps the most effective way to demonstrate the quantitative change that resulted from this doubly compounded arms race is not merely to compare the Israeli and the Arab buildup but also to compare Israel's capabilities at the beginning of the period with those on the eve of the Six-Day War and to perform a similar comparison between Arab capabilities at either end of the period under review (see figures 3–1 and 3–2).[6]

The extent of the quantitative transformation, spectacular as it may have been, was not as dramatic as the qualitative change that took place simultaneously. The mainstay of the IDF in the 1956 war were four (out of a total of five) infantry divisions. Consisting of roughly three brigades each, this force was partly mobile. Most of it, however, was trained to approach an enemy target in "soft" vehicles and then disembark and launch the attack on foot. By 1967 the mainstay of the IDF had become the armored, roughly division-size, formation. To the extent that infantry had survived this dramatic transformation, it had become primarily specialized, an effective and highly respected ancillary.

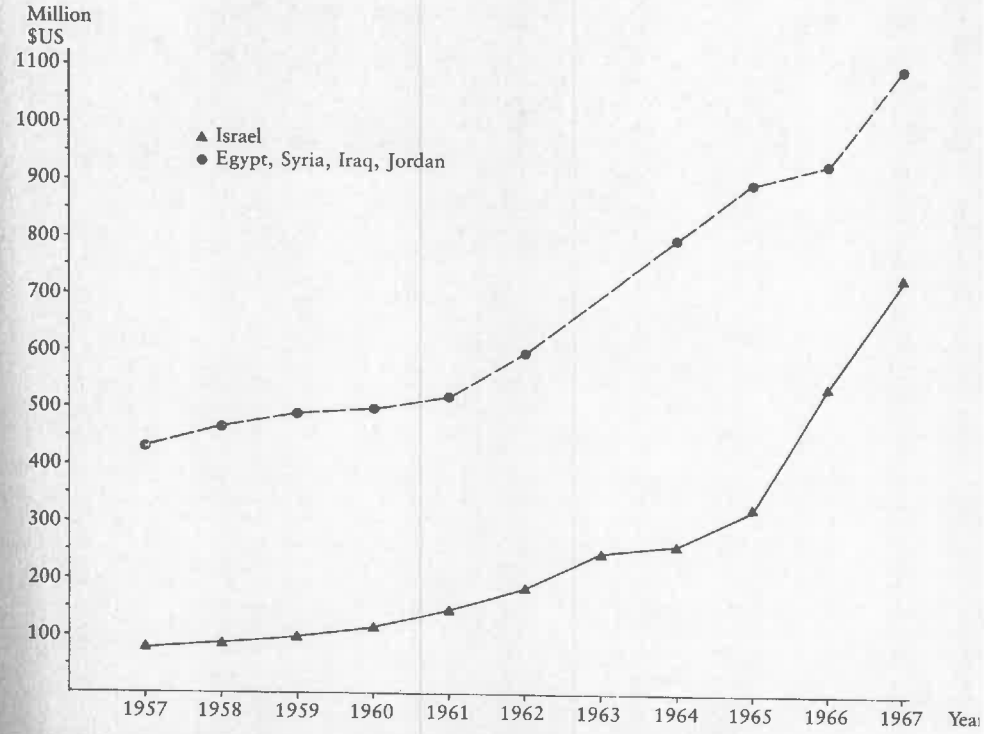
The IDF still had sizable elements of both airborne and nonairborne infantry. These were elite units with first-rate personnel and a particularly high spirit. They had some training in battlefield cooperation with armored formations. Their main task, however, was to carry out special "pinprick" operations, such as helicopter or traditional airborne landings behind enemy lines, combat in built-up areas, or the mopping up of enemy pockets left behind by the advancing armored "fists" or "razor blades." The main element in any operation would thus be the armored task force (*utsba meshuryenet*). Its size would be determined according to the objective. It could be sub-battalion, brigade-size, divisional-size, or even larger. Regardless of size, it would concentrate a great deal of firepower and then rush head-on in deep thrusts through enemy lines. The purpose would be quick decision. The method to acheive this would be a deep "vertical" maneuver in search of a decisive battle. The means would be the combination of mobility and firepower as embodied by the armored formation.[7]



Source: Based on data in *SIPRI Yearbook 1975, World Armament and Disarmament* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1975), p. 126, as quoted by Yair Evron, "Two Periods in Arab–Israeli Strategic Relations," pp. 112–113.

Figure 3–1. Selected Comparisons of Arab and Israeli Military Outlays, 1957 and 1967

Such an image of the most desirable force structure went hand in hand with a similar concept of air warfare. In addition to intelligence and transport, the purpose of the IAF would be, first, to protect the state's air space; second, to shelter and assist ground forces fighting on enemy territory outside the boundaries of the state; and third, to protect the nation's air contact with the rest of the world. The means by which these tasks were to be carried out were first



Source: Based on data in Evron, "Two Periods in Arab–Israeli Strategic Relations," p. 103. In constant $US.

Figure 3–2. The Arab–Israeli Arms Race, 1957–1967

and foremost a supersonic strike force. Instead of the hodgepodge of subsonic and piston-engine planes in ground-support roles that had prevailed in 1956,[8] the IAF had become, by 1967, an impressive supersonic air-striking arm. It was still weak in transport planes and in helicopters, although 96 aircrafts of both types had been purchased (16 piston-engine DC-3 Dakotas; 23 piston-engine Nord-2501 and 7 turboprop Stratocruiser transporters; and 5 Super-Frelon, 13 Bell, and 28 Sikorski S-55 and C-53 helicopters). By deliberate decision the IAF eschewed entirely the capacity to carry out long-range bombing operations.[9] But it had 205 French-built fighters and fighter-bombers (50 Ouragan, 35 Mystère, 35 Super Mytère, 20 Votoure, and 65 Mirage) and even its fleet of trainers had been entirely converted to jets with the introduction of 45 Fouga-Magister (a French aircraft built by license in Israel and fitted especially for strafing and other ground-support tasks).[10]

The change in the IN was less impressive. On June 4, 1967, it had 9 patrol and torpedo boats; 3 destroyers (*Yaffo, Eilat,* and *Haifa*); and 3 submarines (*Tanin, Rahav,* and *Livyatan*). It was arriving at the conclusion that in the

future its main task should be coastal and off-shore defense and support for the ground operations of other IDF arms. In turn this suggested the purchase of compact, high-speed missile boats rather than larger, more expensive vessels. Because of the steeply rising outlays on weapon purchases for other arms, the actual implementation of the new concept was very slow to take shape. In fact, the real change in the order of battle of the IN would be apparent only in the aftermath of the 1967 war.[11]

The rapid move into recent-vintage late-twentieth-century weapons caused a steep rise (approximately 3 to 5 percent, or from an average of 6 to 7 percent per year during 1949–56 to an average of 10 to 12 percent per year during 1957–67) in that chunk of the Israeli gross national product directly devoted to defense. Since the GNP itself grew about 10 percent per year throughout all but the last year of the decade under investigation, this relatively sharp rise was enormous in absolute terms. The defense budget in terms of U.S. dollars is difficult to establish accurately because until the 1970s it was not published. But it seems to have been in the range of U.S. $200–650 million annually—roughly the size of the then-current deficit in the balance of payments. Subsequent analyses revealed that despite the fact that the rise in the defense budget was larger than the net rise in GNP, the country's standard of living also continued to rise. How did the government close this gap? Apparently it did so by borrowing from abroad as well as from the public at home, by allowing a certain degree of inflation, by permitting a slow erosion in the rate of investment, and—when all these stopgap "tricks" proved inadequate—by introducing a planned recession a year before the 1967 war.[12]

Against such a background, there was no escape from a stringent effort on the part of the IDF to economize as well. The main victims proved to be the Civil and Spatial Defense systems. Whereas during 1949–56, or at least until the Egyptian–Czech arms deal, these were considered important pillars of the national strategic posture—a kind of solid "shield" complementing the IDF's mechanized and air-strike "sword," both had become by the mid-1960s depleted appendages of a vast war machine geared almost exclusively to an offensive modus operandi. Whatever assets had been accumulated in the armories of HAGA and HAGMAR (the Hebrew acronyms for the Civil and Spatial Defense branches of the IDF) in the course of the 1950s were left there in reasonable condition. Resources for modernization and training were reduced to a mere trickle, however, and the manpower resources of both organizations had been so downgraded that in comparison with the rapidly modernizing IDF main force they had become an Israeli version of what the British called "Dad's Army."

Another clearly significant development that went hand in hand with Israel's struggle to keep abreast of the runaway regional arms race was the Israeli decision to embark on an independent nuclear program. The soaring costs of purchasing arms and the persistent refusal of the United States or even France to offer a security guarantee convinced Ben Gurion and his disciples Dayan and Peres

that in the long run Israel might not be able to hold its ground. How much time the Jewish state still had before this nightmare became a reality could not be guessed. It was not an immediate threat but, rather, something that, in the estimates of Ben Gurion, Dayan, and Peres, would probably take several decades. Developing an independent nuclear program also takes time, however, especially when obtaining the knowhow and some of the most crucial materials is made difficult by the great powers' determination to prevent nuclear proliferation. Hence it was logical from the Israeli point of view to embark secretly on an independent nuclear program. Its ultimate purpose would be to provide the Jewish state with a weapon of last resort. It would not be a substitute for conventional firepower ("a bigger bang for the buck"), and it would certainly not be a regular instrument for conducting "routine" foreign policy. Rather, it would constitute an instrument to offset the Arabs' quantitative superiority in a moment of extreme emergency. It was hoped that the availability of a small nuclear capability would achieve this in one of two possible ways: either as a means of obtaining U.S. support against the Arabs on an ad hoc basis—if and when, *and only if and when*, the latter were on the verge of a victory in a conventional war—or, if that support proved impossible to obtain and Arab armies were to break through Israeli defenses, as a means of threatening the Arabs directly.[13]

Threats, "Red Lines," and Casi Belli

U.S. pressure on Israel to evacuate the Sinai following its occupation in the course of Operation Kadesh created a distinct possibility that Ben Gurion's government would have nothing to show for the economic cost of the war, for its 190 casualties, and for the struggle in the United Nations that followed it. Moreover, if Israel agreed to withdraw from the Sinai empty-handed, it was possible that not only Nasser but the whole of the Arab world would be greatly emboldened by the results of the war. The operation would then have undercut whatever deterrence Israel had had before launching it—which was not much—or else the war would not have been initiated. For considerations such as these, Ben Gurion would not accept a unilateral withdrawal unless and until at least something more tangible could be extracted, if not from Egypt—with U.S. help—then at least from the United States itself. The result was a tacit U.S. approval of the principle that if and when Israeli navigation through the Straits of Tiran was threatened again, the Jewish state would have the right "in accordance with Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations," to solve the problem by its own means, including the use of force. Israeli Foreign Minister Golda Meir stated this in the General Assembly, and Prime Minister Ben Gurion reiterated the statement in the Knesset, adding that this principle was endorsed by other maritime powers. The main reason that Israel went to war in 1956 in the first place was thus declared publicly to be what it had already been in effect, a casus belli.[14]

The fact that Israel had also gone to war in order to stop the sabotage actions across the Israeli–Egyptian armistice demarcation lines clearly suggested to all interested parties—mainly Jordan and Syria—that there would be a limit in the future, too, to Israel's tolerance of such actions. Nevertheless, neither this nor the concentration of forces on the borders nor any other type of threatening provocations or moves were clearly stated, along with the statement concerning passage through the straits, to be casi belli. The preference for ambiguity, for avoiding clear commitments, for signaling intentions through actions or discreetly through third parties, lingered on.

This was noticed, and soon criticized, by Yigal Allon, one of Israel's leading military experts. A general in the 1948 war, he was, in effect, forced to retire from the IDF at the peak of his career because Ben Gurion suspected that he would politicize the armed forces. Allon, who was clearly associated with the left-wing, hawkish, Achdut Haavodah party, returned to his kibbutz, Genosar, and then spent time as a graduate student at Oxford University. Before completing his studies, Allon returned to Israel, entered politics, and became a leading commentator on strategic and political affairs. In 1959 he published a book-length essay on Israel's position in the Arab–Israeli conflict, in which he advocated an unambiguous enunciation of casi belli. Allon's catalog of Arab actions that Israel should declare casi belli included the following items:

> An offensive deployment of enemy forces
>
> The incorporation of Jordan and/or Lebanon in a wider Arab union with a unified military command, especially if accompanied by entry into the West Bank (in the case of Jordan) or south of the Litani River (in the case of Lebanon) of the armed forces of other Arab governments
>
> The establishment of a Palestinian political entity and the formation of an army under the official control of such an entity, especially if it was supported by one or another Arab government
>
> Any Syrian attempt to thwart Israeli development projects in the Huleh area and/or concerning the utilization of the water of the Jordan River
>
> Further Jordanian interference with Israeli traffic through the Latroun enclave and across east Jerusalem to the Israeli enclave on Mount Scopus, both passage being sanctioned by the armistice agreement
>
> Any Egyptian attempt to reintroduce the naval blockade in the Straits of Tiran
>
> The continuation of the Egyptian boycott of Israeli shipping through the Suez Canal[15]

When Allon's book was published, the author was a member of an opposition party in the Knesset. Given his prominent military background and numerous high-level contacts in the IDF and the Ministry of Defense, he may have been occasionally briefed concerning current military and political thinking. But he was not close enough to the center of power to be regarded as an official spokesman. This is not to say that anyone within the inner circle of decision making would have argued with this list of casi belli. They were all prime reasons for Israeli concern and were widely regarded as likely precipitants of military action, especially if several of them took place simultaneously. The difference between undeclared, perceived *precipitants* and publicly enunciated *casi belli* was important, however. A precipitant does not entail an open, binding commitment to act, a declaration staking the nation's credibility in advance. A casus belli most definitely does so. Allon advocated that widely agreed precipitants would be declared casi belli. His advocacy, however, failed to bring about a change in policy.

This reluctance to announce clear, irrevocable commitments persisted even when events seemed to suggest that the avoidance of commitment was encouraging Israel's adversaries to resort to prodding actions. One area where this was clearly the case was the Israeli–Syrian border, which, relatively tranquil since the massive Israeli raid of December 10, 1955 (Operation Olive Leaves), was gradually coming alive in the late 1950s. The immediate cause was the Jewish state's intention to carry out a number of development projects, all of which were connected to the area's water resources. This had begun in the spring of 1951, when Israel began to reclaim the land of the Huleh swamps. A tiny part of this area was within a DMZ in which, the Syrians argued, Israel was not permitted to effect any significant changes.[16] The tensions with Syria gathered momentum when Israel began the works that would culminate in the National Carrier (*hamovil haartzi*), a massive pipeline carrying fresh water from the Jordan River to the arid Negev desert many miles away. Concerned with preventing a conflagration that might jeopardize its attempts to create an anti-Soviet defense organization in the Middle East, the Eisenhower administration demanded that Israel stop the works until an agreed formula for sharing this precious water was worked out. A plan based on the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) concept and designed to turn the project into the beginning of a cooperative venture among all the parties concerned (the Johnston Plan) was negotiated for two years; accepted by Israel, Jordan, and Lebanon; but rejected by Syria late in 1955, when Damascus signed an arms deal with Czechoslovakia.[17]

Israel then proceeded to continue the project in a different location, further away from the Syrian border. Frustrated but powerless to stop the Israelis through a headstrong move, the Syrians began to build up military pressure along the entire border. This was manifested in a great number of small incidents, such as firing on farmers and occasional shelling of Israeli villages. Had Israel explicitly declared all this a casus belli—had Ben Gurion's government stated in the form of an ultimatum that if Syria did not stop forthwith, a severe punishment be administered—the Syrian

resorted to small-scale subwar violence signaled, in itself, a tacit Syrian admission of an inability to resort to more dramatic forms of warfare. Syria, then, *was* partially deterred even without an Israeli ultimatum and might have been further deterred from carrying out even small infringements on the status quo if only Israel had singled out this low-level violence as a casus belli. Conversely, the evident Israeli reluctance to make such a declaration may well have encouraged the Syrians to believe, despite all the evidence of past Israeli conduct in such matters, that they could continue such actions without suffering an unacceptable punishment.

Israel continued to show restraint until the winter of 1960. Late in January the government decided that the time had come to inflict on the Syrians a blow that would impress upon them how seriously Israel regarded the constant disruption of normal life in the area. This reprisal took the form of an infantry attack on the Syrian position in and around the village of Lower Tawfiq, overlooking the Sea of Galilee. Evidently shaken, the Syrians turned to Egypt (since 1958 Syria's twin within the United Arab Republic) with an urgent request for help. Given Egypt's pretensions for leadership in the Arab world, its patronage of Syria under the aegis of the United Arab Republic (UAR) and its leadership of the Arabs in the struggle against Israel, President Nasser could ill afford to seem evasive regarding this urgent Syrian plea for help. He had to do something that would be spectacular enough to prevent criticism in the Arab world but not so substantial as to induce the Israelis to overreact. As far as can be judged, some such calculus, suggesting that Egypt was deterred by Israel but also that it had great difficulties in warding off pressures from the Arab world, led Nasser to order 50,000 troops with 500 tanks into the Sinai peninsula.

The Egyptian force was detected only when it was already deployed between Jebel Libni and El Arish, very close to the Israeli border. This was clearly a serious failure of Israeli intelligence, and it caught the IDF with only twenty or thirty tanks in close proximity to the border. If the Egyptians were to launch an attack, Israel would have to rely for the first twenty-four hours almost exclusively on the IAF. The IDF was caught, in the words of a note General Rabin passed to General Weizman during an emergency General Staff meeting, "with its pants down."[18]

Beyond the problem of intelligence failure and the inadequacy of Israeli forces-in-being, the Egyptian move demonstrated the shortcomings of Israel's ambiguous posture. Both the Israeli and the Egyptian political-military elites had known since 1956 that the foreward deployment of Egyptian forces of such a magnitude in the Sinai would turn on red lights in Israel and might precipitate a crisis. Yet although this was virtually common knowledge, Israel desisted from tying its own hands in advance by undertaking an open, and thus irrevocable, commitment to administer a punishment. This was a prudent policy in the sense that Israel retained its freedom of action. The price, however, may have been a less effective deterrence than Israel should have projected, given its actual capabilities.

Egypt may well have been tempted to move by the ambiguity of the Israeli position. It did not know the precise limits of Israeli tolerance in this regard because Israel did not state what these limits were. Therefore—under the pressure of the Syrian request for help—the temptation for Egypt to explore what these limits were through actual action was probably irresistible. The Israeli response was secretly to mobilize the thirty-seventh reserve armored brigade, deploy it together with the regular seventh armored brigade near the Egyptian border, but avoid any acts or utterances that could escalate the crisis.

To the Egyptians, the Israeli mobilization may have indicated that Israel would not allow Egypt to go any further. It also betrayed Israel's pervasive reluctance to allow the matter to escalate. Under these circumstances, Nasser could decide—if he was in a mood to run greater risks—simply to order the forces to settle down in the El Arish–Jebel Libni area. This would have erased one of the most glaring consequences of the 1956 war and thus would have endowed Nasser with a badly needed victory. The fact that he did not choose to do so suggests that he was afraid of Israel's reaction—in other words, that he was deterred. Yet although from this point of view Operation Rotem (as the incident was code-named in Israel) was a reassuring success, in the final analysis it would have been better from the Israeli viewpoint to act in a way that would deter the Egyptians from crossing into the Sinai in the first place. To achieve this Israel would have to draw clearer "red lines" than it had done. For reasons that will be explored later, this was more than it was prepared to do.

If Israeli policy prior to the Rotem crisis was not optimal, Israel's conduct in the course of the crisis was exceedingly effective. For one thing, although Ben Gurion's government did not take Nasser's action lightly, it also did not panic and was not tempted to read into the Egyptian leader's move more than there was to it. Since 1956 Nasser had become the main apostle in the Arab world of the assiduous argument that, on the one hand, Israel was an implacable enemy that had to be restrained and perhaps eliminated; but that, on the other hand, Israel was too formidable to be assaulted without intensive, meticulous, and hence long-term preparations. This was Nasser's way of telling his radical rivals in the Arab world (especially in Syria and Iraq) that he was every bit as determined as they were to fight Israel, but that he would not be dragged into war prematurely and suffer yet another defeat.[19]

An anxious and isolated Israel, as it had been before the 1956 war, might have failed to read this double message between the lines of Nasser's numerous speeches. Such a failure could have easily led to a serious conflagration as early as February 1960. But the newly acquired self-confidence of the Israelis after their 1956 success made some of them, paradoxically, more cautious. Indeed, the reluctance to become openly committed to sharply drawn casi belli persisted, despite telling episodes such as Operation Rotem, until the end of the 1957–67 period.

An excellent example was provided by Shimon Peres, then deputy minister of defense, in an article published in the IDF monthly, *Ma'arachot*, late in 1962. Addressing himself to the "time dimension" in the Arab–Israeli conflict (a euphemism for the question of whether Israel or its adversaries had time on their side), Peres enumerated five changes (which he defined as *ilot*, Hebrew for "pretexts") in the situation that would make another Arab–Israeli war likely:

> The first pretext—if Egypt blocks the straits of Eilat [sic]—Israel will fight to open them.
>
> The second pretext—if Egypt conquers Jordan—Israel will not remain idle.
>
> The third pretext—if the Arabs build up a force large enough to jeopardize the existence of Israel in an immediate sense, or if they concentrate such a force in an intimidating proximity [to Israel]—such a concentration might lead to a confrontation.
>
> The fourth pretext—if Israel seizes water that are not its own—according to its neighbors—the Arabs will react vehemently.
>
> The fifth pretext—if Israel acquires an unpredictable power—real or imagined—the Arabs will react vehemently.[20]

The language of this statement of casi belli is interesting. It does not specify how much Arab military strength would be too much from the Israeli point of view, or how close a concentration of Arab forces would be regarded as too close. In addition, Peres adds to three casi belli from the Israeli point of view two casi belli from the Arab point of view, but again leaves them very vague. Finally, as if to leave no doubt that he intends no irrevocable commitment, the deputy minister of defense employs the inappropriate but suggestive term "pretexts" while time and again stating that all these changes in the status quo are "pretexts" according to "foreign sources" that he left unspecified.

A not dissimilar list of "Arab acts which would constitute an automatic casus belli for Israel" was related to a leading scholar in private by Gideon Rafael, a senior Israeli diplomat, some four years after the publication of Peres's list. Rafael enumerated four acts belonging in this category: "two are on water, two on land, north, south, east and west; one is the attempt to divert the waters of the Jordan, another the closing of the Straits of Tiran; a third is the control of the Jordan 'bulge' [the West Bank] by a state or a united command more powerful than Amman [Jordan]; and the fourth is the concentration of Egyptian military power in the Sinai desert."[21]

This was clearly far more explicit than any previous official statement, and it certainly represented accurately the Israeli concept of precipitants. The fact that it was not published until 1972, some four years after the crisis in which most of these events happened and did indeed lead to war, underlines once again the main point in this part of the discussion—that Israel had a clear concept of what changes in the status quo would precipitate military action. Under the leadership of David Ben Gurion (who finally retired in 1963) as under the leadership of Levi Eshkol, who succeeded Ben Gurion as prime minister, Israel persisted, however, in its reluctance to state these precipitants boldly and thereby turn them into effective instruments of deterrence.

Aware of this, Allon, who meanwhile had become minister of labor and a leading member of the cabinet security committee in Levi Eshkol's ministry, apparently continued vigorously to advocate a change in policy. Addressing a closed meeting of the MAPAI Young Guard (*Hamishmeret Hatseira*) on February 22, 1967, Allon repeated the essentials of his thesis in his previously mentioned 1959 book, *A Curtain of Sand*. This time, however, he went beyond the original version in his statements concerning casi belli, which he no longer prefaced with caveats. Instead, he spoke explicitly of casi belli, which he had not done in the published 1959 version. Moreover, he added to the list a number of new items while dropping some of those on the original list. "In six possible cases," Allon said, "Israel will be entitled and perhaps obliged to go to war":

> a. In the event of a dangerous concentration of offensive [Arab] forces.
> b. When it transpires that the enemy is preparing a surprise air attack on Israel's air bases.
> c. If the Israeli nuclear reactors [at Nahal Sorek and Dimona] are attacked from the air.
> d. If guerrilla warfare, mining and shelling reach a level at which it can no longer be dealt with effectively through passive defense and reprisals.
> e. If Jordan enters into a military alliance with another Arab state and permits the deployment of foreign troops on its territory, especially west of the Jordan [River].
> f. If Egypt blocks the Straits of Tiran.

Given Allon's official position at the time of this important statement, there can be little doubt that he expressed in this presentation a prevailing concept of war precipitants. But the fact that the lecture was delivered behind closed doors and was published for the first time only in the fall of 1967—three months after the Six-Day War, in which most of these casi belli were rendered obsolete—leaves little doubt that this was still an advocacy rather than an official policy.[22] Allon had persistently favored a vigorous posture of deterrence. He saw clear and unambiguous proclamation of casi belli as an important element in such a national posture. His colleagues, however, saw matters differently. There was little doubt among them that if one, and certainly if several, of the scenarios on Allon's list materialized, the Jewish state would have to resort to force again. But either because of their dilletantism in strategic thinking (at least in comparison to Allon), or because of their apprenhensions concerning Arab, great power, and/or domestic reactions, Allon's cabinet colleagues would not endorse in an authoritative, binding manner (such as a speech in the Knesset and a vote on it thereafter) any statement of casi belli. The policy in this regard remained as ambiguous as it had been before the 1956 war.

Patrons and Partners

The French connection that Israel forged on the eve of Operation Kadesh went beyond anything the Israelis had dreamed of during the preceding years of isolation. France supplied Israel with all the arms it needed, with scientific know-how, with access to advanced nuclear research and technology, with the foundations of an important aviation industry, and above all with a sense of pride and self-respect that had been badly shaken by repeated rebuffs from other major powers. Although Israeli–French relations continued to gather momentum in the years following the joint war against Egypt—although, in fact, they reached their peak somewhere between 1958 and 1962, when General De Gaulle was prepared to hail Israel as France's "friend and ally"—it gradually dawned on the Israelis that this tacit alliance had its limits. The French would not turn it into an open alliance based on a contractual commitment for mutual aid in the event of war and ratified in the legislatures of both countries. In fact, France began to move in another direction once the main cause of the alliance, the Algerian rebellion (and France's consequent conflict with the Arab world) came to an end.[23]

Realizing these limits of the French connection, Israeli policymakers came to a variety of different conclusions about the prospects for securing worthy alliances. Dayan stood for the most pessimistic view in this regard and, in fact, advocated something that can best be described as defiant self-reliance. Israel, he said, would not be saved by others simply because it was a Jewish state with such a history of suffering behind it. To ensure its security and survival, the Jewish state should assume the posture of a "detonator" or a "biting beast." Anyone in the world, including the great powers, should know that if they attempted to disregard Israeli interests, there would be such an explosion that their own interests would also be damaged. Circumstantial evidence suggests that this view led Dayan, as early as 1957, to advocate an Israeli nuclear program.[24]

The up-and-coming Yigal Allon, whose background and upbringing were not dissimilar to Dayan's (both of them were *sabras*—Jews born and bred in Palestine), did not share Dayan's view that a last-resort nuclear weapon was an urgent necessity. Much like Dayan, however, Allon too advocated self-reliance.[25] He would not oppose a formal treaty of alliance with a great power if that were feasible, Allon wrote. But this was not the case. Israel was unique in the world in the sense that neither bloc would accept it into their ranks. To plead with them would not only be disgraceful, Allon argued, but positively harmful. A constant refusal by the great powers to extend their protective patronage to the Jewish state would merely serve to underline Israel's basic weakness in Arab eyes. Hence Israel should assume a posture of self-reliance and try to make the most of it.[26]

By contrast with both Dayan and Allon, Abba Eban, always the staunchest advocate of an alliance with the United States, was convinced, as of the 1958 U.S. intervention in Lebanon, that the Eisenhower administration had already come round to the idea that Israel was an important strategic asset. Sooner or later, Eban thought, Israel would be able

connection, continued to believe in its viability but also shared the views of Dayan and Ben Gurion regarding a nuclear program; in addition, he invested a great deal of effort in attempts to cast Israel's net wider. Peres succeeded in establishing a security liaison with the Federal Republic of Germany (with which Israel had no diplomatic relations); he explored the possibility of an Israeli membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as well as in the European Economic Community (EEC), then in the planning stages. He also laid the foundations for Israel's policy of dynamic involvement in black Africa.[28] The resourceful and largely successful efforts of Peres, coupled with the fact that he had become Ben Gurion's right-hand man, greatly frustrated the new foreign minister, Golda Meir. The latter developed a vindictive grudge against Peres that survived until her retirement from politics in 1974. With the exception of the nuclear program, however, a question on which Meir apparently disagreed with Peres, Ben Gurion, and Dayan, she found herself enacting many parts of Peres's other foreign policy advocacies. Chief of these was the attempt to circumvent Arab hostility through an extensive Israeli network of close relations with the emerging continent of Africa.[29]

Arguing the case for these sometimes conflicting foreign policy orientations, these and other key policymakers were united in four underlying assumptions. First, there still was no military equivalent to political understandings with Israel's adversaries. If such understandings could be reached, they would greatly strengthen Israel's security. After more than a decade of failed attempts to establish contact with leaders of the Arab world—from Abdullah, Hosni Zaim, and Nuri al Said to Nasser and Hussein—the bulk of Israel's foreign policy decision makers had become somewhat cynical. Imperceptibly—indeed, contrary to their own declared ethos—they had gradually shifted the emphasis from a search for a political settlement, or at least a détent, to a policy of containment—namely, a search for political arrangements that would act as effective countervailing forces to the Arabs and their Soviet allies.

Second, the demonstration of Israel's military prowess in the Sinai campaign had changed the nature of the problem of alliance affiliation. Henceforth Israel could act on the assumption that both friend and foe were sufficiently impressed to change their approach toward the Jewish state. Israel was no longer a weak and dependent irritant for friends and an easy prey for foes. It had become a regional power to reckon with.

Third, Israel could strengthen its deterrence, as well as its terms of collaboration,[30] with great powers by engaging more forcefully in the regional balance-of-power game.

Fourth, as a consequence of the combination of the previous three factors, Israel could make do for the time being with secondary or even tertiary types of alliances—that is, far less formal and far less public types of alliance connection than the standard primary type. The urgency of obtaining the contractual and public protective patronage of a great power had declined. It was

which Israel had only a fraction of what it needed) to uranium (which it also lacked). However, the protective political and strategic dimension of the problem had become less acute.

The practical implication of the first two of these assumptions was that for the short- and medium-term future, deterrence could be obtained on the basis of, primarily, a conventional war-winning military capability. This conclusion was reinforced anyway by the rapidly changing force structure of the IDF, from an infantry-based defensive force to an armor- and air force-based instrument for a blitzkrieg. The practical implication of the third assumption—that Israel should engage more forcefully in the regional balance-of-power game—took some time to gel into a concrete concept.

In the 1920s and 1930s Ben Gurion often spoke of the need for an Arab–Jewish alliance. The improbability of the idea did not take him very long to realize. One result was that he began to wonder, occasionally, whether the Zionist movement should not attempt to align itself with other forces in the Middle East that also had a fundamental conflict with the (mainly Sunni Moslem) pan-Arab movement. This led to an on-again, off-again dialogue between Zionist leaders and a variety of leaders of the Maronites in Lebanon. Having investigated the value of this Maronite connection, the Israeli Foreign Ministry reached the conclusion by the very beginning of the 1950s that the Maronites were a hollow reed. Ben Gurion and Dayan, on the other hand, were not entirely convinced. Thus, when the noose seemed to be tightening on Israel as a result of the meteoric rise of Nasserism, Ben Gurion and Dayan proposed to Prime Minister Sharett to establish a link with the Maronites; engineer a coup d'état in Lebanon; and help to establish a small, Maronite-dominated state that would be in alliance with Israel. Their main motive was, it seems, to prevent Lebanon's turning into an active confrontation state. If Israel did not turn Lebanon into its proxy, or buffer, somebody else would turn it into a launching pad for operations against Israel.

Sharett thought that the whole idea was a recipe for disaster—indeed, that Israel would get itself into a quagmire if Ben Gurion's scheme were carried out. He vetoed it, and Ben Gurion, who was out of office, accepted the verdict.[31] But the germ of the idea that Israel could gain tangible strategic advantages from a balance-of-power-oriented response to the regional political process did not die. It did not materialize in the context of Lebanon, nor did anything come out of it when Israeli emissaries established contacts with representatives of other non-Arab and/or non-Moslem governments, such as Turkey, Iran, and Ethiopia. Some Israeli policymakers, however, among them Ben Gurion and Dayan, were convinced that the convergence of the interests of these powers with Israel's was real and that the main reason for these states' lack of enthusiasm was Israel's image of weakness in the 1949–56 period. The corollary to such a perception was that the demonstration of Israel's vitality—its spectacular performance on the battlefield in the course of the 1956 Sinai campaign—should have transformed the evaluation of Israel by these same regional forces. What was difficult to obtain before the 1956 war, supporters

Such thinking was reinforced by events in the Middle East during 1957–58, especially the Eisenhower Doctrine; the near collapse of Lebanon and Jordan; the bloody coup in Iraq; the Egyptian–Syrian union; the growing friction between Syria and Turkey, Iraq and Iran, Egypt and Ethiopia; the growing Soviet involvement in the affairs of leading regional powers like Egypt, Syria, and Iraq.[32] In turn several Israeli policymakers, chief of them Ben Gurion, became convinced that the moment was ripe for an imaginative diplomacy that would extract for Israel the utmost advantage from this state of regional affairs. Specifically, the idea was to develop a three-tier system of regional alignments with Israel as the linchpin holding them together and deriving the utmost benefit from such a pivotal role.

The overt dimension of the scheme would be an alliance between Israel and Turkey, Israel and Iran, and Israel and Ethiopia. This tier, tying together countries that were at conflict with the Nasser-led militant part of the Arab world and with the Soviet Union, would be buttressed by another overt tier binding all these countries with the West in general and with the United States in particular. In addition, however, there would be a third, covert tier involving non-Arab and/or non-Moslem minorities, such as the Christians in Lebanon, the Druzes in Syria, the Kurds in Iraq and the Christians in southern Sudan.[33]

The potential benefits for Israel from such a regional architecture seemed enormous. The scheme would stengthen the Western interest. It would hold at bay the resurgent pan-Arab movement with its radical ideas, violent choice of means, patently Islamic coloring, and limitless ambitions. Moreover, the proposed regional structure would turn Israel into an important asset instead of the liability the Jewish state appeared to have been before. Rather than retaining its image as an isolated focus of Arab hostility, Israel would be integrated into a stabilizing, structurally reliable component of a global camp of nations. Rather than pleading in vain to be incorporated into a Western brainchild such as MEDO, which in any case was abortive, Israel would be the initiator of a regional structure, act as its linchpin, and proceed to reap a rich harvest of Western gratitude and assistance. Above all, if such a scheme ever took shape, it would imply that whenever the Arabs considered war against Israel, they would have to take into account the possible reactions of all the other participants in the scheme, both in the Middle East (Ethiopia, Iran, and Turkey) and beyond (in particular, the United States). Israel's deterrence would thus be enormously strengthened.

The impact of the third, covert, tier of the scheme on the ultimate outcome would be similar. If the Christians of Lebanon had an alliance with Israel, the very existence of such a bond, it was thought in the late 1950s, would be sufficient to draw the attention and pin down some of the resources of the Syrians. If the Kurdish minority in Iraq were helped in its struggle with the regime in Baghdad, the Iraqi army would be unable to commit extensive forces to another Arab–Israeli war. If Sudan had a mutiny or even near-mutiny of

In addition to this strategic perspective, the scheme as a whole, and in particular its minority tier, had a quasi-ideological attraction. The main villain of the Middle East piece, the source of trouble for all, appeared to be the militant, anti-Western, Sunni Moslem, pan-Arab drive for fulfillment. What it seemed to be striving at was the recreation of a huge Arab superpolity, stretching (as in the seventh and eighth centuries A.D.) from the Persian Gulf to the shores of the Atlantic. What this superpolity would inevitably entail, some Israelis argued, was intolerance toward anything that did not entirely fit into it. Every non-Moslem, non-Sunni, or non-Arab minority in the region was thus a thorn in the flesh of this pugnacious movement for unity. Its ethos was predicated on the assumption that the Middle East was a Suni Arab ocean. Therefore, it was in the interest of all those factors in the Middle East that did not fit into this description to emphasize the pluralism, the mosaiclike heterogeneity of the region—the fact, in Ben Gurion's words, that it "is not an exclusively Arab area"; that "on the contrary, the majority of its inhabitants are not Arabs"; that the "Turks, the Persians and the Jews—not to mention the Kurds and the other non-Arab minorities in the Arab states—are more numerous than the Arabs in the Middle East."[34] An alliance of minorities and states that did not fit into the pan-Arab vision would do just that.

In retrospect it is difficult to avoid the impression that the key to the success of the entire edifice was the cooperation of the Western powers, in particular the United States. If the latter were to strengthen Ben Gurion's hand, if they were to lobby the Middle Eastern governments in question and perhaps apply some pressure on them to go along with the Israeli plan, it could well have materialized, at least in part. Conversely, the polite but firm refusal of the U.S. government to endorse the plan doomed it from the very beginning, since the incentives for Iranians, Turks, and Ethiopians to go along were not great to start with. They could see the limited but real convergence of interests between them and the Israelis. They did not object to cooperation with the Israelis whenever that coincided with their immediate interests. But the far-flung vision of the plan left most of them cold. Some of the details of this Israeli search for Middle East partners are worth recalling in greater detail.

Israel had had diplomatic and trade relations with Turkey since the 1950s. When U.S.–Israeli relations were at a low ebb during the first half of the 1950s, Israeli's relations with Turkey suffered, too. When, following the Suez campaign and the U.S. intervention in Lebanon, Israeli relations with the United States began to improve, the Jerusalem–Ankara axis, which Ben Gurion sought to establish, increasingly appeared feasible as well. Impressed by Israel's swift and decisive victory in the Sinai and apprehensive about the effects that the Egyptian–Syrian union and the Qassim coup in Iraq could have on their own position (given the fact of Turkey's common border with both Iraq and Syria), the Turks themselves indicated an interest. Ben Gurion suggested to President Eisenhower that the United States should further encourage Turkey (and Iran) to

cooperate with the Jewish state. But although the Americans were evasive, Ben Gurion moved ahead and, on August 28, 1958, flew secretly to Turkey for a meeting with Prime Minister Menderes.

The talks showed a clear meeting of the minds between the Israeli and Turkish prime ministers. The practical results, however, turned out to be meager. Even under the Menderes–Bayar regime, the Turks showed little interest in pursuing links with Israel beyond a certain amount of trade. This attitude was also upheld by the Girsel regime following the coup d'état of May 1960. Thereafter, Turkish–Israeli relations basically stagnated. The threat of Nasserist and Soviet pressure from Syria and from the Soviet Union itself subsided. The U.S. attitude toward Turkey in the course of the Cyprus crisis of 1963 strained relations between them and drove the Turks to a rapprochement with the Soviets. And the combined effect of these two separate trends was to render Israel an essentially marginal factor in the overall Turkish foreign policy calculus.[35]

A far more rewarding pattern gradually emerged in Israeli–Iranian relations. Though reluctant at first to recognize the Jewish state, Iran extended de facto recognition and established a diplomatic legation in Tel Aviv as early as March 1950. Six months later an Israeli diplomatic delegation seeking a de jure recognition and more extensive relations arrived in Teheran. The Israeli requests, however, were turned down. Several months later, following the rise of Mossadeq, the Iranian legation in Tel Aviv was closed. There were even demands by influential Iranians such as the Speaker of the Majlis, Ayatollah Kashani, that Iran's relations with the Arab world should be improved and that the ancient Iranian Jewish community of hundreds of thousands should be expelled en masse. Nor did the eclipse of Mossadeq herald any significant improvement. There was, to be sure, a slight improvement in commercial links. By 1953 Israel had begun to receive small quantities of Iranian crude oil, which were shipped to the new port of Eilat, but this was not accompanied by any significant development on either the military or the diplomatic front.

Iran's reaction to Israel's military victory in the 1956 campaign was ambivalent. On the one hand, echoing the exceedingly harsh reaction of Washington and reflecting some deference to Arab indignation, Iran issued a sternly worded note of censure condemning the venture. On the other hand, Iran was duly impressed with Israel's performance, apprehensive about the political gains of the Soviets, and concerned about the potential ramifications in the Middle East of Nasser's evident success in turning this military defeat of Egypt into a political gold mine. The first sign of this latter attitude was a secret request, early in 1957, for a meeting of the Iranian deputy premier, General Bakhtiar, with a high-ranking Israeli. Within several months Bakhtiar had established working relations with Ya'akov Karoz, a political officer (apparently a Mossad agent) in the Israeli Embassy in Paris. The two met several times, and Karoz was subsequently invited to Teheran. The result was an Iranian invitation for Israel to set up an undercover liaison office in Teheran. Iran also increased

the flow of oil to Eilat. Solel Boneh, the Histadrut (trade union) construction conglomerate, began to operate in Iran, and El Al, Israel's national airline, inaugurated a line from Tel Aviv to Johannesburg with a stop in Teheran.

By the summer of 1958, Iranian–Israeli relations had gathered further momentum. Iran became increasingly worried by the coup d'état in Iraq, the Syrian–Egyptian union, the attempt by Arab radicals to destabilize the regimes of Jordan and Lebanon, and above all the evident involvement in all these developments of Iran's great neighbor to the north—the Soviet Union. Noting that Washington was not averse (though it was not enthusiastic, either) to the Israeli scheme of regional alliances, and tending to exaggerate Israel's ability to wield influence in Washington through the so-called Jewish lobby, the shah seemed to have reached the conclusion that the emerging link with Israel should be boosted further. Ben Gurion and the shah began to correspond. Eshkol, the Israeli minister of finance, paid a visit to Iran and met the shah. Israel constructed a pipeline from the port of Eilat on the shores of the Gulf of Aqaba to the port of Ashdod on the Mediterranean. The line not only helped Israel to purchase more crude oil in Iran but also provided an alternative route for Iranian oil, thereby decreasing dependence on Nasser's goodwill concerning the use of the Suez Canal. Iran reopened its diplomatic legation in Tel Aviv, at first as a section in the Swiss Embassy but later as an independent mission. Abba Eban, who had just completed a long tour of duty in Washington and New York as Israeli ambassador to both the United States and the United Nations, paid a visit to Teheran as well.

On July 23, 1960, the eighth anniversary of the Egyptian revolution, the shah announced that Iran was recognizing the state of Israel de facto. President Nasser of Egypt reacted with a sharply worded diatribe, and Egypt severed diplomatic relations with Iran. The shah, however, remained unperturbed. Indeed, not only did he authorize the continued expansion of Iranian–Israeli relations, but in December 1961 he also hosted the Israeli prime minister and minister of defense, Ben Gurion, in Teheran. This was an affront that Nasser could ill afford to ignore. He therefore launched simultaneously a propaganda campaign and a wave of well-orchestrated subversive activities in the Khouzistan region. Although the shah persisted in his refusal to upgrade relations with Israel to the exchange of embassies, he also refused to yield to Nasser's heavy-handed pressures. Following the visit to Iran of Moshe Dayan, the former IDF chief of staff, who was widely regarded as the chief architect of the Israeli victory in the Sinai campaign and who, since 1959, had been minister of agriculture in Ben Gurion's government, Israel launched a major reconstruction project in Iran's earthquake-damaged province of Khazvin. Even after Ben Gurion retired from public life in June 1963, Iranian–Israeli relations did not change course. The new Israeli premier, Levi Eshkol, who as minister of finance was one of the first high-ranking Israelis to visit Iran, sent his own minister of finance, Pinchas Sapir, to Teheran as well.

Soon relations between the two countries began to spill over from civilian to military cooperation. In January 1964 the Israeli chief of staff, Lieutenant-General Tsvi Tsur, and the director-general of the Ministry of Defense, Asher Ben Nathan, stopped in Teheran for two days of talks with the Iranian chief of staff, General Hijazi, and senior members of this staff. This meeting led to the sale to Iran of Uzi submachine guns, to Israeli instruction and training of Iranian army units, to intelligence sharing, to Israeli involvement in the establishment of the SAVAK (Iran's secret police) and to Israeli–Iranian cooperation in assisting the Kurdish rebels of Mula Moustafa al-Barazani's in their struggle against the Iraqi central government.

Though considerable, these Iranian–Israeli links were still a far cry from Ben Gurion's grand design, in which the emphasis was on the public commitment of the partners to come to each other's aid in the event of an attack by a third (Arab) party—namely, on the deterrent aspect of the alliance. Nevertheless, Israel and Iran seemed to be moving toward an alliance that would add important increments of security to Israel by increasing the burden on the Arabs and thereby forcing them to be more preoccupied with their security.[36]

Israeli–Iranian relations were sometimes presented in a broad historical perspective that traced their origins to the fifth century B.C., when Cyrus the Great issued a proclamation calling on the Judaic exiles in Babylon to return to the Land of Canaan and restore their Temple on Mount Zion. A similar motif sometimes appeared in analyses of Israeli relations with imperial Ethiopia, the third angle in Ben Gurion's triangular grand design. The Ethiopian emperor, according to one tradition, was a descendent of Menelik the First, who is said to have been the first fruit of King Solomon's lovemaking with the Queen of Sheba. Historical myths notwithstanding, modern Ethiopian relations with Israel have followed a balance-of-power, interest-based pattern no less than have the Jewish state's relations with Turkey and Iran.

During the occupation of the country by Fascist Italy, the Ethiopian emperor, Haile Selassie, who called himself the Lion of Judah, found refuge in Jerusalem, where he was well received by the Jews and was looked after by the local congregation of Church of Ethiopia clergy. When Israel was established, however, the emperor, who had been returned to power in Addis Ababa by the British, refrained from establishing diplomatic relations with the Jewish state until as late as 1953. Thereafter a great improvement took place. Ethiopia's tense relations with Nasserist Egypt probably help to explain the shift, as does Israel's Sinai victory in 1956. On the other hand, the Ethiopian government—much like the Turkish and Iranian governments—remained aloof toward Israel in its public utterances. There were probably two reasons: concern over further isolation in the Middle East and sensitivity to the reactions of Ethiopia's large Moslem population.

The most important turning point occurred in 1960, precisely when Ben Gurion's drive to implement his grand design was at its peak. There were, again,

two important reasons for this—an escalation in Ethiopia's conflict with Somalia over the future of the Ogaden Desert, coinciding (perhaps not by accident) with the intensification of the revolt of the Shifta tribes in Eritrea, and with Nasser's intervention in the Yemen—across the Red Sea. All three events must have created a sense of intimidating isolation in the Ethiopian capital. Ethiopia needed arms and military advice. It also needed development projects that could improve the standard of living (and with it the waning popularity of the aging emperor). Israel could provide both, as it had demonstrated elsewhere in Africa as well as in Iran. Israel itself was also eager to engage in cooperative ventures with the Ethiopian regime for the general reasons already explained as well as for very specific strategic reasons: preventing the turning of the Red Sea, the only sea route to the port of Eilat, into an Arab lake. If Nasser succeeded in his intervention in the Yemen, as seemed certain in the early 1960s, he would be able to deny Israel access to Eilat and thus, in effect, undo the results of the 1956 war. Accordingly, Israel needed an access to Ethiopia's long Red Sea coast; to obtain this strategic advantage, it needed close relations with the Ethiopian regime.

The second reason for the turning point in Ethiopia's relations with Israel in 1960 was more directly connected to the fortunes of the emperor himself. On December 14, 1960, while paying a visit to Brazil, the emperor heard of a coup d'état in Addis Ababa. His supporters transmitted radio appeals for help—specifically, for Israeli help. The emperor flew back at once but, for good measure, stopped in Liberia on his way. While in Monrovia, he requested that the Israeli embassy pass on to Jerusalem a request for help.

This presented the Israeli government with a dilemma. Some of the rebels were on very good terms with the Israeli mission. Should they be helped and the emperor forsaken? Or would it be more advisable to do the reverse? Ben Gurion decided to help the emperor, and the coup was quelled. Thereafter, Ethiopian–Israeli relations moved rapidly toward the implementation of Ben Gurion's grand design. Economic relations were expanded. Israeli experts established a variety of plants in Eritrea and in Ethiopia proper. Sea links between Eilat and Asmara were expanded. Israeli experts established a national university in Addis Ababa. Israeli military personnel trained Ethiopian soldiers to fight counterinsurgency warfare in Eritrea and more conventional warfare in the Ogaden. Israel set up observation posts on the ethiopian Red Sea coast to monitor Arab and Soviet shipping through the Bab-el-Mandeb Straits and in the Red Sea. Last but not least, the Ethiopian government permitted Israeli experts to cross the border to Sudan and establish links with the Christian guerrillas who were fighting the central Sudanese government.

These important links in the Horn of Africa and the Sudan, like the Iranian connection and the involvement with the Kurdish rebels, came close to what Ben Gurion had in mind. They constituted an attempt to circumvent the Arab noose dangling around the Jewish state. They forced the Arabs to commit

their attention—and sometimes their forces—to areas that were far from Israel, thereby dispersing the Arab war effort and making it less dangerous. All these links, however, never quite matured into the formal alliance structure Ben Gurion had hoped for—an alliance involving commitments to act whenever one of the allies became subject to attack. Israel, as one Ethiopian put it, remained a "mistress" rather than becoming a "wife." Nevertheless, the sum total of these developments was quite positive from the Israeli point of view.[37]

While developing these important links, Israel also made important strides in its efforts to develop bases of support in Africa, Latin America, and south Asia. Hundreds of Israeli experts were involved in development projects throughout the third world. Thousands of Africans and Asians were training in both civilian and military centers in Israel. A large and lively diplomatic community established itself in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Israel's position in the United Nations seemed secure and respectable. Its relations with France were intimate, with the EEC and with the United States quite close. Even its relations with the Soviet bloc were cordial. Consequently, the urgency of eliciting explicit commitments from great powers seemed to have subsided; even the regional dimension of the grand design no longer assumed the same urgency as it had in the late 1950s.

To be sure, Israeli emissaries continued to apply what pressures they could on the Iranian and Ethiopian governments to upgrade the formal and public level of their relations with the Jewish state. They also occasionally raised the question of a formal alliance with U.S. leaders, including Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. For several reasons, however, Israeli leaders lowered their sights in this regard: they fully realized that such formal commitments, which could have constituted a crucial element in Israel's ability to deter its Arab adversaries, would not be offered; they were greatly reassured by the tacit U.S. security guarantee; they were increasingly aware of Israel's enhanced leverage vis-à-vis the United States ever since the latter had discovered the military significance of the Jewish state's independent nuclear program;[38] they remained somewhat reassured by U.S. and French public references to Israel as an "ally"; they were flushed with a strong feeling that theirs had been a success story; above all, they were filled—especially after the departure of the ever-anxious Ben Gurion—with a new sense of security, strength, and self-confidence. Formal deterrence-strengthening alliances continued to be upheld as a long-term foreign policy goal, but they ceased to be regarded as an urgent short-term "must."

The Diplomacy of Violence

The single most important factor contributing to Israel's new sense of relative security was the IDF's performance in the course of the five-day campaign of 1956.[39] Before this operation, the Egyptian army had seemed more formidable

and Israel's perception of the need for outside support had been correspondingly stronger. It was for this reason that Ben Gurion was so adamant about the need for French and British involvement in the attack on Egypt. By the same token, once the crisis was over, the Israelis could look back and marvel at their achievement. Britain and France, hitherto considered world empires, appeared weak and beaten. Egypt seemed to be making the utmost of the political success that it had no doubt obtained in this crisis (thanks to U.S. miscalculations and British weakness). Beyond this, the Israelis could not fail to recall that no Arab state had come to Egypt's rescue and that the Egyptian army had been served a stunning defeat by the IDF.

The impact of this perception of the 1956 crisis on Israeli military and political thinking was far-reaching and profound. In the first place, the military and political elite of the Jewish state became increasingly reassured concerning their nation's ability to go to war alone and achieve its objectives. Second, the advantages of a preemptive, first-strike posture seemed to have been irrefutably reaffirmed. Such a posture gave the IDF the initiative; it maximized the element of surprise and shock; it endowed the IDF with a tremendous momentum that made it, in a way, a stronger, more effective military force in the last day of fighting than in the first. Above all, Israel's initiation of the operation enabled it to concentrate all its force on one Arab state. Whereas in 1948 the Arab world had united and then initiated war in accordance with its own choice of time, scale, and location, in 1956 the Arabs were so surprised by the Israeli attack that no confrontation state would join Egypt unless and until it became clear that the latter was winning, or at least not losing. Thus the fact that Israel had initiated the war acted as a formidable multiplier of its force. The IDF could focus on Egypt and, by serving a knockout blow to this pivot of the Arab world, could also virtually ensure that no other Arab state would join the fighting.

Seen in more or less these terms, the 1956 victory constituted a triple strategic gain from the Israeli point of view:

1. It put a stop to the harassment and attrition of the 1953–56 period.
2. It constituted such a tour de force that it endowed the Jewish state with new—and seemingly very important—increments of deterrence.
3. It seemed to offer an excellent recipe for the future.

The main ingredients of this recipe may have begun to emerge about a year before the 1956 campaign, but that success seemed so remarkable that it removed all doubts about the preferable strategic posture. From now on Israel would abandon all attempts to rely on a defensive posture. The key to national security would be, instead, a defensive posture executed (in the words of Lieutenant-General Chaim Laskov, one of the IDF chiefs of staff during the 1957–67 period) *offensively*[40]—namely, what has been defined in the present

discussion as quintessential deterrence. Starting from an unequivocal acceptance of the status quo since the completion of the IDF's withdrawal from the Sinai, the macro strategic-political purpose was as defensive as it had always been. The micro military-tactical method of working toward this purpose, however, would be decidedly offensive.

More specifically, this posture implied two fundamental preferences with respect to the employment of force, one relating mainly to so-called basic security (all-out war) and one relating primarily to current security (subwar violence). The first was as simple as it was harsh: Israel would never allow its adversaries the luxury of a first-strike war. In 1948 the Arabs had begun the war, and Israel had lost 8.9 percent of its population (7,000 casualties out of a population of some 650,000). In 1956 Israel had initiated the war (on the assumption that a full-scale confrontation had become inevitable in any case) and had lost only 190 lives at a time at which its population was already greater than 1.5 million. Permitting the Arabs to initiate war could lead again to a heavy toll. Since in the Israeli perception minimizing IDF casualties was the single most important factor in the national strategic calculus, the conclusion was simple: an Israeli first strike—either a preventive or a preemptive/interceptive strike—was inescapable, a "must."

If, however, Israel failed to initiate or (more likely, in the Israeli perception) if and when the Arabs resorted to attrition practices of the type that had largely precipitated Operation Kadesh, Israel's response would be massive punitive retaliation. As General David Elazar explained, with reference to Syria:

> Israel must always escalate in order to deny . . . [Syria] the game of false peace, while they carry on a permanent guerrilla war. The Syrians had to learn that even if they knew when and how a confrontation would commence—they would never be able to tell how it would end. . . . Israel should be able to dictate the end of such incidents. . . . For the quicker the escalation, the earlier the moment in which Israel brings to bear its main advantage, namely, its ability to use heavy and sophisticated weapons such as tanks and planes.[41]

The fact that the escalation during the 1953–56 period did not bring about deescalation but, contrary to Israel's earlier expectations, further escalation and ultimately war evidently did not lead to an Israeli reappraisal. Dayan's fundamental argument that a showdown was preferable to slow bleeding had, in fact, become orthodoxy. The Arabs, in this view, could afford low-level violence ad infinitum, but Israel could not. If the IDF escalated quickly, the Arabs might be more cautious. They would have to take into account the possibility of a full-dress war even if all they intended was a small, seemingly isolated incident. Hence they might be deterred. If, on the other hand, they were not deterred and a showdown did result, it would still be more acceptable from the Israeli point of view since it would be fought on Israel's terms and in a method of warfare that maximized the advantage of the party with an edge in striking

(rather than staying) power—or so argued Elazar and the rest of the IDF General Staff.

Acting on the assumption of a first-strike and massive retaliation posture, however, did not necessarily mean thrashing out an explicit doctrine or specifying all this in public declarations. The reliance on first strike could be assumed but could not be declared for fear of foreign—U.S., French, and even Soviet—reaction. The hope, evidently, was that the Arabs would understand the existence of such a predisposition on the part of Israel simply because Israel had acted in such a fashion in the 1956 war. Moreover, indicating and signaling time and again a disposition toward massive retaliation did not mean specificity in the promised punishments. Indeed, in the emerging Israeli doctrine, leaving unspecified the timing, the location, and the scale of ripostes was elevated to the rank of a cardinal operational principle. "Except in very rare cases," wrote Yigal Allon on this topic, "it is better to leave the enemy in the dark as to our intentions." The reason, he argued, was that this would force the adversary to guess which of an infinite number of possible Israeli retributions would actually be administered, as well as when and where. Facing such a situation, the adversary would find it more difficult to take defensive precautions or preemptive actions.[42]

Both theoretically and in practice, the choice of a posture of massive retaliation was reversible. The IDF could withdraw from such a method of retaliation to a more flexible, tit-for-tat approach if only it—or the government—saw fit to do so. The change of strategy in this regard would not necessitate any corresponding modification in the order of battle. Not so, however, in the case of the preference for first strike. Insofar as this part of the emerging strategic package was concerned, the choices were irreversible because of their ramifications in terms of weapons procurement and, more generally, allocation of resources.

Two seemingly unrelated and equally far-reaching decisions taken in the course of the 1957–67 period illustrate this irreversible nature of the drift toward an exclusive first-strike posture. The first related to the proposition that Israel should construct a defensive line along the Egyptian border. From a topographic point of view, the access from the Egyptian Sinai to the heart of Israel is confined to a relatively narrow opening of roughly forty miles somewhere between Auja and Rafah. Such a line touches on the Mediterranean at its northern end and on a rocky massif at its southern end. Hence this gateway can be blocked quite effectively with fortifications. The idea came up for discussion toward the end of the 1950s but was ultimately rejected.[43] One reason for the rejection was, presumably, that Egyptian control of the Gaza Strip meant that an Israeli defensive line would not be able to reach the Mediterranean. This would leave such a large hole that it would greatly reduce the line's efficacy.

This, however, may have been a relatively minor reason for rejecting the idea of an Israeli Maginot line. A far more important reason seems to have been the estimate that the cost-effectiveness of a defensive deployment based on a massive line of fortifications was significantly inferior to that of a war-winning armored force. It seemed self-evident that Israel's limited resources would not permit both a defensive line and a war-winning armored capability. The choice, in fact, was between an almost exclusively defensive posture and an almost exclusively offensive one. That the spokesmen for the armored corps would reject the notion of a fortified line could be expected. Since there are no traces of any great debate on this issue, it may plausibly be assumed that most of the participants in the debate concurred. Indeed, to the extent that can be judged, the arguments in the late 1950s for preferring an offensive, armored posture to a defensive one relying on a line of fortifications were compelling.

It was generally agreed that as long as Egypt desisted from launching a war, no other Arab state would dare to do so, either. Hence blocking the entry of the Egyptian army into Israel could ostensibly solve Israel's national security problem. But could it? Would such a line take care of Israel's long and exposed coast? Would it take care of Arab air forces? Would it be able to prevent airborne and helicopter landings of Egyptian commandos? Would it not lead to a situation in which the IDF became bogged down in protracted exchanges of the attrition type, which would play straight into the hands of the Arabs? Of course, if it were possible to construct such a line without a corresponding reduction in allocations for the building of an offensive armored corps, the idea would be far more acceptable. Indeed, it would endow Israel with a balanced combination of, so to speak, a shield and a sword. Given the insurmountable constraints on the IDF's budget, however, this was not possible. Consequently, all available resources went into the procurement of tanks, armored personnel carriers (APCs), artillery pieces, and the enormous logistic tail that goes along with them. The IDF, by moving in this direction, in fact eschewed a defensive option altogether.

A not dissimilar problem was encountered during 1960–63 in regard to the question of air defenses. President Kennedy offered Israel Hawk missiles in virtually unlimited quantity. Although this could be considered a major departure in U.S. policy—the first-ever occasion on which the United States offered Israel major arms (on a previous occasion the Eisenhower administration had offered a consignment of about a hundred jeep-mounted recoilless guns)—it was motivated by a shrewd assessment of Israel's strong disposition to rely on a first-strike doctrine.[44] If Israel were to take care of its air defenses by relying on these missiles, it would have to shift the emphasis away from building a large air-striking force. In the event, the Jewish state might gain a nearly foolproof defense against any Arab attempt to launch a disarming first strike, but the corollary to this uncertain gain would be that Israel would then be denied the most important instrument with which to launch a disarming first strike of its own.

President Kennedy's offer occasioned a major debate in the Israeli defense establishment. Those who supported acceptance of the U.S. offer argued that Israel could, with these missiles, project an effective deterrent. Those who disagreed argued that this was impossible. Again, as in the case of the proposed Auja-Rafah line, there was no doubt that if Israel could afford both a fleet of fighter-bombers and a massive shield of missiles, it would be better off. It would be a few notches closer to possessing the conventional equivalent of a strategic nuclear second-strike capability. Since it could be taken for granted that the Arabs would try, probably successfully, to obtain similar systems, the chronic instability of the Arab–Israeli conflict would be significantly reduced. Differently stated, if it were assumed that the evident Israeli preference for preemption was the outcome of the fact that both Israel and its adversaries had only first-strike capabilities, then the introduction of an approximation of second-strike capabilities on both sides of the Arab–Israeli divide could be a major step toward, at least, freezing the conflict at its level of the early 1960s.

If such were the arguments of the Kennedy administration—and of Israeli supporters of reliance on Hawk missiles—the main counterargument was that an absolutely reliable defense was simply inconceivable, especially without nuclear weapons. "President Kennedy's generosity," mused Ezer Weizman, commander of the IAF, "will cost Israel a lot of money. The exchequer is empty and every dollar has at least ten claimants. If this paupers' purse would have to be called upon to pay for Hawk missiles, it will mean procuring fewer planes." But, asked Weizman, would a smaller strike force be sufficient? His own answer was emphatically negative,[45] and he seems to have succeeded in persuading the prime minister as well. As Ben Gurion wrote in a confidential telegram to President Kennedy, "Hawk is appreciated but GOI [the government of Israel] regrets that in light [of] new offensive weapons being prepared by Israel's neighbors, Hawk alone is not a deterrent."[46]

The result was that the IAF purchased five batteries of Hawks for the protection of major installations (air bases, nuclear reactors, ports, and the like) but invested the bulk of its resources in building a first-rate air-striking arm. As in the choice of mobile armor rather than a static line of defenses, this was an irreversible decision. It provided Israel with a formidable offensive capability, but at the price of foreclosing all options except the all-out offensive one.

The war scenario on which the expansion of the IAF during the 1957–67 decade was predicated went roughly as follows. A major change in the status quo—either an infringement of Israel's system of casi belli or, alternatively, intelligence information suggesting an imminent Arab attack—would impel Israel to launch a preventive or (as in the latter case) preemptive strike. This would begin with a disarming attack on the military airfields of the main adversary (probably Egypt). Such an attack would take several hours of maximum peril, since in its duration Israel's air space would be virtually exposed. If this gamble during the initial half day was successful—and since the Arab air forces

did not seem to be prepared for this, the IAF had no doubt that it would be—the advantages would be enormous. In the first place, it could be expected that other Arab parties would be deterred from joining. If they desisted from joining, the bulk of the IDF's armor could concentrate on one major adversary that, moreover, would have no air support. If, conversely, another Arab party were to join the war, the IAF could hold it at bay while the ground operations continued against the first victim of the initial strike. The purpose of this fighting on the ground would be to break through enemy fortifications and force the adversary into a major battle of decision. This decisive battle should be of sufficient magnitude virtually to obliterate that adversary's ability to carry on the fight. Once this objective was achieved, the IDF could shift its main force to other fronts and deal with other adversaries more or less one at a time.

All this was clearly designed to overcome Israel's numerical inferiority and dependence on a mainly reserve force, to achieve a quick victory before any great power had a chance to intervene, to demolish the adversary's ability to fight, to "kill" (in Weizman's words) "the maximum number of Arabs in the minimum amount of time,"[47] to capture some territory for political bargaining, to improve the IDF's deterrent image—and to do all this at the lowest possible cost in blood from the Israeli point of view. The main weakness of this perspective on the next war that guided IDF training, weapons procurement, and tactics—in fact, all its activities—was that it precluded from the outset the possiblity of leaving to the Arabs the tormenting choice of whether or not there would be another war. Israel decided in this manner that if it had a clear war-winning capability, this in itself would act as a sufficient deterrent until some time in the early 1970s. What would happen if this expectation were not fulfilled—if the Arabs were to make a move earlier than the 1970s that would seem to render an Israeli first strike a virtual imeprative—does not seem to have been adequately considered.

Another major flaw in the emerging Israeli reliance on an all-out first-strike posture was that it provided no intermediate alternative between all-out confrontation and undisturbed stability. Either the Arabs would move in a way that would almost automatically switch on the Israeli war plan, or they would do nothing. What seems to have remained unclear until the crisis of May 1967 was what Israel would do if the Arabs did not play their part in the script precisely as expected. The answer to this question was evolved incrementally, too. It boiled down to a piecemeal, almost reflexive, series of decisions to rely on massive retaliation as the principal instrument for deterrence against subwar Arab harassment. To be sure, this was not the policy concerning the Egyptian–Israeli border, since this area was utterly pacified as a result of the consequences of the 1956 war, Nasser's troubles in the Arab world, and in particular the near demilitarization of the Sinai and the presence of UNEF. Nor was this the policy—for most of this period—on either the Jordanian or the Lebanese border. In both these cases the governments in question seem to have been adequately

deterred by past experience with the Israelis. If Egypt, the Arab world's "big brother" in the course of this decade, were deterred from allowing any military activity against Israel from its territory, Jordan and Lebanon could feel free of any obligation to do more. They had learned that Israeli punitive action could be very painful; they knew, since the crises of the summer of 1958, that the Israeli policy of maintaining the status quo by declaring their borders with Syria and Iraq a red line boiled down to a tacit guarantee of their independence and territorial integrity.[48] They had no real territorial or other grievance against Israel, and they were not particularly enamored of either the Nasserist or the Ba'thist visions of Arab unity—in which these two states would be regarded as shameful, illegitimate reminders of the *ancien* (colonial) *régime*. For all these reasons they had every incentive to play by the Israeli rules of the game while noisily maintaining a pretense of being faithful to the inter-Arab rules. In a word, neither Jordan nor Lebanon would easily be dragged—or so the Israelis thought—into a confrontation with the Jewish state.

This did not apply to Syria. Plagued by deep ethnic and regional divisions; frustrated by a glaring gap between the abiding myth of a golden past and the depressing reality of a squalid present; torn between resignation to its shape and size, a yearning for leadership of a large Arab world, and a competing fascination with an elusive vision of a Greater Syria; and irresistibly titillated by various contemporary radical ideologies, Syria emerged during the 1957–67 decade as a scene of perpetual turmoil and a hotbed of regional instability. It rapidly became an irritant to all its neighbors, including Turkey; a source of constant embarrassment for Nasser's Egypt; and the wellspring of ever-escalating subwar threats against Israel. The last gradually spilled over to the territories of Lebanon and Jordan and ultimately brought about the 1967 crisis.[49]

If Syria's domestic turmoil constituted the main background factor accounting for escalation in the Arab–Israeli conflict, the immediate cause of friction was Israel's vigorous endeavor to complete the National (water) Carrier project. Having given U.S. intermediary Eric Johnston all the time he needed to seek a multilateral agreement among Israel, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon concerning the equitable distribution of the waters of the Jordan River, having seen Johnston's plan rejected by Syria, Israel was determined to push ahead with the project. To be sure, since both Lebanon and Jordan were prepared to endorse the substance of the plan but not to sign an agreement unless and until Syria did so, Israel proposed to the United States to carry out its own part of the unsigned overall agreement.

Since Syria was increasingly becoming part of the Soviet orbit in the Middle East—and, during 1958–61, a virtual province of Nasser's United Arab Republic (UAR)—and since the project was objectively important for the Israelis, the United States approved the Israeli approach. This approval was facilitated by the fact that Israel proposed to move the site where the water would be pumped from the Jordan to the northwestern corner of the Sea of Galilee, a place called Eshed Kinrot. The catalyst of the reaffirmation of U.S. support, according to one exceedingly well documented study,[50] was Jordan's approach to the World Bank in September 1961 for a loan with which the Jordanian government proposed to carry out its own irrigation project.

Israel cautioned that approval of the loan to Jordan might lead to the undermining, through Jordanian action, of the understandings within the framework of the Johnston Plan. Anxious to help Jordan and Israel while still preserving the main elements of the Johnston Plan, the U.S. State Department offered to reiterate in writing Dulles's assurances to Israel back in 1955, which the late secretary of state had also reaffirmed in 1958. Still not quite satisfied, Israel sought a commitment to these principles from an even higher authority. In November 1962 President Kennedy wrote to Prime Minister Ben Gurion and reaffirmed all previous commitments.

While this exchange was unfolding, Israel had already carried out a major part of the project. This alarmed Syria, which feared that its empty-chair policy concerning the Johnston Plan might backfire: Israel and Jordan would get their share, but Syria would be left out on a limb. Syria alerted other Arab governments, and as of the spring of 1959 the topic was on the agenda of the Arab League. Three courses of action were proposed. The first was a military operation, the second a scheme to divert the water of the Jordan at its sources (the Jordan river derives most of its water from three separate springs, the Hasbani, the Banias, and the Dan; the first two were under Syrian and Lebanese control, whereas the last was on the Israeli side of the DMZ). The third option was a demarche in this regard to the United Nations.

Syrian radicals supported the first, military, alternative. Nasser, however, would not go along with this, since he was evidently aware of the possibility of a harsh Israeli reaction. Indeed, it seems that Nasser deliberately dragged his feet on this issue, as apparently reflected by the fact that it took the Arab League Political Committee more than a year—from late 1959 to early 1961—to adopt an official position in this regard, and that the alternative that was embraced was the second—namely, a diversion scheme. Reinforcing the impression that Nasser was averse to any provocative action is the fact that three more years passed before the January 1961 decision of the league's Political Committee was translated into an operational directive, complete with a budget allocation. Thus only in the Arab summit conference of January 1964 was it finally decided that Syria should begin the diversion project, to be completed within eighteen months, and that the total budget would be somewhere between $168 and $235 million in U.S. dollars.

Strictly speaking, the Arab summit decision was not an act of war. It entailed the rejection of a military option, and it concerned itself with actions to be taken well within Syria's sovereign territory. But such reasoning would also mean that Egypt—which depends on the Nile as much as Israel depends

on the Jordan—has no say whatsoever when it comes to Ethiopian or Sudanese action relating to the sources of the Nile. If Israel were to allow Syria to abort the already completed National Carrier project, its economy would suffer irreparable damage. From the Israeli point of view, therefore, any attempt to implement the decision of the Arab summit meeting would be a casus belli.

The question was what could Israel do to prevent the Syrians from carrying out their diversion project. Within days of the summit meeting, Eshkol, the incumbent prime minister and minister of defense, issued a reassuring statement promising that Israel (in accordance with the multilateral Johnston Plan) would not use more than its fair share of the water. Eshkol concluded his statement, however, with a stern but ambiguous warning that Israel would not allow its neighbors to "deny" it the right to exist or attempt to cause it any "injury." This warning was repeated in a Knesset resolution passed in September 1964, when Syrian earth-moving equipment began to appear in the vicinity of the diversion site.

Eshkol's careful combination of soothing and threatening words reflected a decision to avoid anything that might increase tensions. In fact, the prime minister spoke after a careful evaluation of the alternatives at the IDF General Staff. Some participants in the debate suggested that the only way to thwart the diversion scheme was simply to move in force and capture the diversion site. Lieutenant-General Yitzhak Rabin, the chief of staff, was far more cautious. He pointed out that the problem was not Syrian shooting at Israelis but the presence of Syrian earth-moving works on the Syrian side of the border. Hence, Rabin argued, from the Israeli point of view it would be quite enough to take steps to stop the Syrians from working. This could be done heavy-handedly through the use of massive firepower, or it could be done surgically: every bulldozer entering the diversion site would be shot at in a manner that would scare its operator and dissuade him from carrying on. Of course, it could not be taken for granted that the Syrians would not move to protect the works. But the decision whether or not to escalate would fall squarely on Syria, not on Israel.[51]

This advocacy by the chief of staff of what amounted to a strategy of flexible response appealed to Prime Minister Eshkol, who, by inclination and temperament, was a moderate man of compromise and good humor.[52] When this strategy was applied, however, it became immediately clear that the Syrians were determined to return fire and even to escalate. In fact, they shot back not only at Israeli military positions but also at the civilian population in the densely populated area known as the Galilee Finger—an elongated valley lying between the Syrian-controlled Golan Heights to the east and the Lebanese Arnoun Heights on the west. Differently stated, Syria chose to escalate both vertically (in terms of the choice of weapons) and horizontally (in terms of the area to come under fire). As a result, Israel was forced to abandon flexible response and fall back on massive retaliation. The weapons involved in this encounter, which reached

its peak in November 1964, included at first light firearms, then mortars and medium-size machine guns, then artillery and tanks. When even this escalation failed to deescalate, Israel ultimately turned—for the first time since 1951—to air power.

Could all this have been prevented? Probably not. Having obtained an Arab summit mandate to carry out the project after years of chiding Egypt for not doing its utmost to fight the common enemy, Syria could ill afford to back down unless and until it could prove it had done everything in its capacity to be as good as its word. Israel's initial attempt to defuse the situation through flexible response thus came up against a determined opponent, whose order of preferences was the obverse of its own: Syria was eager to have a static encounter, whereas Israel wanted to avoid one. Hence Israel's only way out of the trap was to raise the level of fire to air power—namely, to Syria's level of military incompetence.[53]

Syria, however, could not accept defeat. The stakes for the regime at home and for Syria in the Arab world were too high to be risked by conduct that would elicit charges of cowardice. The Syrians therefore resorted to an indirect alternative: helping a number of Palestinian organizations to get together and form a body called al-Fateh (Arab acronym for Movement for the Liberation of Palestine: *Charakat at-Tachrir al-Philastin* in reverse). Syrian military intelligence encouraged small parties of members of this newly created body to launch small, pinprick raids inside Israel.[54]

As on previous, comparable occasions, Israel held Syria directly responsible and launched counterattacks in a variety of forms. The common denominator of most Israeli retributions during the last two years before the Six-Day War was the emphasis on larger and more sophisticated weapons. Instead of relatively surgical infantry raids (The Sea of Galilee in December 1955, Tawfiq in January 1960, and Nuqeib in March 1962), the IDF relied increasingly on artillery fire, armor fire, and air strikes.

This new style of retribution was the result of a variety of factors. First, Syrian fortifications, based on the Soviet model and constructed with the assistance of Soviet experts, had become far more sophisticated than in the past, and infantry raids would be more hazardous than they had been up to the 1962 Nuqeib raid. Second, the OC Northern Command during this period was General David Elazar, formerly OC of the armored corps (*Ha Gayis*). It was thus not entirely surprising that he would prefer to rely increasingly on armor—not least, according to some evidence, because he was anxious to exercise the IDF's concepts of armored warfare.[55] Third, as of April 1966, the head of G3 (Operations) Branch of the IDF General Staff was Ezer Weizman, whose previous position had been commander of the IAF. As he related later, his advice to his colleagues on the General Staff was to escalate vigorously. "In 1966 we cannot carry out reprisals of the 1955 style," he argued. The days in which a small force would "enter [an Arab village or police station] at

night, lay a few pounds of explosives, demolish a house or a police station and take off" were over. "When a sovereign state decides to punish those who hurt it, it must act differently. We have armor and we have an air force. We should enter in broad daylight and act forcefully."[56]

Last but not least, Ezer Weizman's opposite number on the Syrian side, Hafiz al-Assad, seems to have been impelled by the exigencies of his domestic position to advocate a similar strategy of escalation. Assad was, as of the coup d'état of February 1966, number two in the Syrian power structure. A tough-minded member of the Alawi minority, he was the commander in chief of the Syrian air force and was said to be in fierce competition with Damascus strong man, Salah Jedid, another Alawi. Thus it is not inconceivable that the rivalry between these two at the apex of the Syrian regime bred an increased tendency to escalate the conflict.[57]

It seemed clear that Assad's domestic position would be jeopardized if he allowed the IAF to continue to roam freely over Syrian airspace and to produce provocative, window-breaking sonic booms over the capital, Damascus, as the IAF had begun to do regularly since the National Carrier skirmishes in late 1964. Hence, as of August 1966, Syria declared its intention to employ air power for strikes at the Israeli rear, too.[58] The result was rampant escalation, a succession of dogfights between Israeli and Syrian planes in the fall of 1966 and the spring of 1967 in which the Syrians kept losing planes while Israel suffered no losses. The Syrians responded by increasing the fire against Israeli civilians in the Galilee Finger. This prompted Israeli leaders to issue stern threats of retribution. Tensions had reached a new peak in the autumn of 1966. Sensing this, Prime Minsiter Eshkol attempted to stabilize the situation through soothing public statements emphasizing Israel's desire to "stop shooting and start talking."[59] Although a number of meetings of the Israeli–Syrian Mixed Armistice Commission did take place during January and February 1967, however, the tensions did not really subside, and the entire system continued to grind toward a full-scale confrontation.[60]

Thus despite the enormous improvement in Israel's overall situation, the Jewish state became once again a prisoner of a nearly deterministic war trap. The breathtaking pace of the arms race drove it to rely exclusively on a first-strike posture as the means of deterring the Arabs from launching a general war and of dealing with such a war situation if and when it developed. The pressure of the Syrians led, after a short-lived attempt to play flexible response, to ferocious massive retaliation as the main instrument for countering subwar threats. As during the 1953–56 period, the upshot was rapid escalation on the level of subwar confrontation pushing the system more or less deterministically toward a major showdown. Moreover, also as during the 1953–56 period, the driving force behind the scenes was the upper echelon of the IDF. The difference, however, was that on the road leading to the Sinai campaign, the IDF had had a formidable civilian boss, David Ben Gurion, whereas on

the road to the Six-Day War, the prime minister and minister of defense was Levi Eshkol, a far friendlier and, in a way, more humane character than his stern, almost demonically dedicated, distant, and enigmatic predecessor—but also a far less astute master strategist.

The Domestic Politics of Escalation

The most common Israeli interpretation of the origins of the Six-Day War puts the blame entirely on Syria. The Ba'ath republic, most Israelis believed at the time, was internally in a state of crisis resulting from a fierce struggle for power. This drove it to an external radicalism that focused in particular on relations with Israel. The Jewish state was thus a hapless victim of straightforward aggression. In the words of one study, the

> violence [along the Israeli–Syrian border] no longer could be related simply to territorial claims and counterclaims. Much of it reflected the unique nature of the Syrian Ba'ath regime. Advocating a curious melange of Leninism and pan-Arabism (although with increasing emphasis upon the latter), the junta of Syrian officers who had seized power in 1962 soon revealed themselves as the most grimly chauvinist government in the Middle East. Their diatribes on behalf of the Viet Cong, the Maoists and the Guevaristes, and against the United States and Israel, were splenetic and at times psychotic. The truth was that the Damascus cabal enjoyed little popular support, and barely survived two armed revolts in September 1966 and February 1967. It was this very weakness which propelled the regime's strongman, Colonel Salah Jedid, and his colleagues into an uncompromising stance on the one issue that was universally popular—a war of liberation against Israel.[61]

Apologists for the Arab cause tend to offer the same interpretation in reverse—namely, that domestic trouble in Israel spurred Israeli adventurists to seek an outlet in another war with the Arabs and that the helpless Syrians fell victim to a cold-blooded, premeditated, and meticulously planned grand Israeli maneuver. "In early 1967," according to one widely read account by a journalist of clear anti-Israeli persuasion,

> Israel's congenital militancy was pushing it towards . . . a decision [to launch another war]. In a sense it needed the war. It was suffering the severest economic crisis of its existence; unemployment stood at ten percent; the growth rate had plummeted; subventions from the diaspora were drying up; worst of all, emigration was beginning to exceed immigration—a yardstick which of course indicated, more than any other, that the economic crisis was a crisis of Zionism itself. What this portended [had been forecasted already in 1962]. . . . Israel's leaders have the habit of putting down her economic difficulties to the boycott of all trade and economic relations maintained by the Arab states, and the

> pressure they exercise on other countries to limit trade with Israel. In such circumstances there seems . . . to be a great temptation to find some excuse to go to war and thus break out of the blockade and boycott—to force peace on Israel's terms.[62]

Both the pro- and the anti-Israeli arguments contain important nuggets of truth. The former is correct, according to all studies on the topic to date, in arguing that Syria's internal instability increased its propensity to adopt a militant posture vis-à-vis Israel.[63] The latter is certainly correct in stating that Israel was in the throes of a severe economic recession when the Six-Day War broke out. Yet both approaches were quite unsuccessful in drawing credible inferences from the correct data they present.

A realistic appreciation of the process of escalation that led to the 1967 crisis must begin with the acknowledgment that both Syria *and* Israel were impelled to act the way they did by a combination of standard, somewhat shortsighted, strategic calculations as well as by the exigencies of their domestic political processes. This is not the same as a Machiavellian conspiracy theory suggesting that decision makers were consciously and openly seeking to solve their domestic problems by dragging their countries into war. Such an interpretation, however, does accept the argument that, at least insofar as Israel was concerned, strategic-military decision making during the 1957–67 period was not conducted with as much autonomy from domestic politics as is sometimes argued.[64]

The decade can be divided in this respect into two parts: the 1957–63 period, in which Ben Gurion was still prime minister and minister of defense, and the 1963–67 period, in which his positions were taken over by Levi Eshkol. During the first five and a half years, the insulation of strategic and military decision making from domestic politics was more or less complete because of the preponderance of *ha-zaken*, the old man (or what the Germans at the same time called the aging Dr. Adenauer, *Der Alte*). Ben Gurion restrained public debate about national security affairs, limited discussion of these matters at the cabinet, kept briefings to the Knesset Security and Foreign Policy Committee to a bare minimum, and did not hesitate to impose strict censorship on the press.

Although this amounted to an undemocratic politicization of defense matters, it also proved an effective way of conducting the nation's most important business. Israeli national security policy during this period was conducted (relatively speaking) smoothly, effectively, and consistently. There was a clear guiding formula establishing a logical balance among various subfields of the national security sphere. There was a clear, consistent projection of a measured balance between a policy of strength, on the one hand, and a policy of restraint on the other. The defense budget was kept under tight control. The IDF's top echelon were treated by the minister of defense (who was almost twice their

average age) with affection—but they also knew their place. Their job was to offer professional military advice. Their superior's job was to make the ultimate strategic-political decision.

Halfway between the retreat from the Sinai and Ben Gurion's retirement, this model of autonomy of the security sphere began to come under domestic political fire. The roots of the change seem to have been connected with the beginning of what was presented at the time as a conflict of two competing world views (socialism versus statism), but they might be more properly described as a struggle for succession. Conscious of his own advanced age, Ben Gurion sought to cultivate a cohort of younger people to whom the management of national affairs could be entrusted. Although the Old Man was surrounded by a coherent group of experienced veterans about ten years younger than himself, including such high-powered individuals as Levi Eshkol, Golda Meir, Zalman Aran, Dov Joseph, Mordechai Namir and Pinchas Sapir, Ben Gurion was apparently determined to pass the reins of power to a younger generation. Fascinated by youth, especially if and when it went along with being a native of Palestine and not an immigrant from an eastern European Jewish *shtetl* (small town), he apparently sought to install in positions of influence individuals such as Dayan, Peres, Eban, and others of their age group.

This transpired gradually through the 1950s but took a major step forward after the 1959 elections, when Ben Gurion promoted to cabinet membership a number of well-known disciples of his: Moshe Dayan (as minister of agriculture), Shimon Peres (as deputy minister of defense), Abba Eban (as minister without portfolio and later minister of education), and one or two of their internationally less well known allies. The result was a political tug of war, not only between the new appointees and their older rivals in the cabinet but also, inescapably, between the latter and David Ben Gurion. As Israel Yesha'ayahou, a frustrated ministerial hopeful of the older generation, bitterly complained to Ben Gurion on one occasion, the "question is entirely that of the coat of many colors. [As in the biblical story of Joseph and his brothers,] all those present here are your sons, and you have chosen Josephs of your own, robed them in coats of many colours, and aroused the great jealousy of those whom you have left coatless."[65]

The pressures that this emerging struggle generated were not connected directly to the sphere of national security at first, but they soon impinged on it, too. The first phase was the public debate concerning the 1954 Lavon affair. When Ben Gurion was in retirement, Lavon, Ben Gurion's choice for the Ministry of Defense, apparently authorized activation of a dormant military intelligence network in Egypt. The purpose was sabotage, with a view to inducing discord between the then-new Nasserist revolutionary regime, on the one hand, and Britain and the United States, on the other hand. This ill-conceived and ill-fated scheme was clearly the stillborn child of a state of mind of isolation and despair that typified Israel's attitude at that time. It failed

abysmally; the ring, consisting mainly of Egyptian-born Jews, was captured, tried, and severely punished (two of its members were hanged).[66]

Israeli military censorship kept the entire issue from the public for six years. Then it exploded into a public issue because Lavon, who retired in 1954 and subsequently became secretary-general of the Histadrut, demanded complete exoneration of any responsibility for the affair bearing his name. Ben Gurion, however, maintained that only a judicial body could either exonerate Lavon (and thus place the blame on others) or, conversely, reaffirm Lavon's culpability. Lavon, not satisfied by this, threatened to launch a public campaign for his acquittal. Since this would jeopardize the public standing of MAPAI—the precursor of what later became the Labor party, of which all these poeple were top leaders—the second-echelon leadership (Eshkol and Meir, among others) tried unsuccessfully to prevail on Ben Gurion to accept the verdict on the issue of a committee of seven cabinet ministers. Hence despite the prime minister's boycott of the vote of this committee, the cabinet proceeded to appoint it.

The so-called Committee of Seven conducted only a limited inquiry and then, somehow, acquitted Lavon. Ben Gurion, however, would not accept its verdict. In a vain attempt to mollify him, the MAPAI top leadership forced Lavon to retire. Nevertheless, Ben Gurion would not withdraw his demand to initiate judicial investigation. The upshot was such a fierce conflict between the prime minister and his own party's leadership that MAPAI lost five seats in the next election. The new cabinet, Ben Gurion's last, was negotiated and brought together, not by the prime minister but by Eshkol acting on his behalf.[67]

The implications of these events for Israeli national security were far-reaching. It was the first time that the very core of the most secret part of national security policy had been aired in public. The disorder, incoherence, and power struggles within the national security elite that were made public suggested a far less reliable, rational, and effective management than had been the image of Israel before. The cohesion of the incumbent cabinet was gravely disrupted, thus giving Israel an image of weakness. Above all, the decline of Ben Gurion's stature as a result of the scandal was underlined by the fact that the old guard of his party succeeded in forcing him to accept into his cabinet after the 1961 elections three ministers (Allon, Carmel, and Ben Aharon) from Achdut Haavodah, the left-wing, hawkish party that Ben Gurion had kept out of government since 1948.

Before long this new power structure had manifested itself in significant changes in Israel's national security preferences. The tenuous alliance between Ben Gurion and the MAPAI old guard collapsed. The old man retired from office and, on the eve of the 1965 general elections, broke away from the party which he had founded and had led for two generations. Taking Dayan, Peres, Teddy Kollek, Yitzhak Navon, and others of his disciples with him, Ben Gurion formed a new party called RAFI (Hebrew acronym for "the workers of Israel list" but also a popular diminutive for Rafael). Its platform

showed a clear statist emphasis—namely, advocacy of an ethos of modernization, liberalization, the promotion of a vision of advanced science and technology, and above all a change in the electoral system that would turn Israel into a cross between the British two-party parliamentary and the French Fifth Republic presidential systems.[68]

Contrary to Ben Gurion's hopes, RAFI gained only ten seats in the 1965 elections. Thus the founder of Israel and the godfather of its national security system found himself in the opposition, while the veteran leadership of his own former party set up a new coalition government based on a MAPAI/Achdut Haavodah axis. In terms of national security policymaking, this meant that the inner core of decision makers was dramatically transformed. Eshkol, whose strength had always been in economic affairs, became prime minister and minister of defense. Golda Meir, whose impact on foreign policy had been greatly restricted when Ben Gurion was prime minister and Peres deputy minister of defense, now came to occupy a central role in foreign policy decision making. But the most dramatic change in the setup was the fact that after fifteen years in which they had been ruthlessly denied access to national security policymaking, Yigal Allon, Moshe Carmel, and Israel Galili of Achdut Haavodah were suddenly a preponderant force in the formulation of national security policy.

This led to two important changes of emphasis in policy preferences. First, unlike Ben Gurion, Dayan, and Peres, who felt that a vigorous bid for a last-resort nuclear program was an urgent imperative, Allon in particular was sanguine about Israel's ability to hold its own on the basis of a purely conventional order of battle. Apparently Allon succeeded in carrying Eshkol and Golda Meir along with him. Consequently, faced with further U.S. pressures to slow down the nuclear program, Eshkol yielded. He requested U.S. supply of greater quantities of more sophisticated conventional weapons and, when the Johnson administration agreed to supply them, he undertook to permit U.S. inspection on an ad hoc basis of the 24-megawatt Dimona nuclear reactor and promised to slwo down the drive toward a nuclear capability for military purposes.[69]

Although the details of this agreement remain unknown to this day, the fact that it took place became known at the time throughout the Israeli national security elite. It elicited acrimonious charges from Ben Gurion of a "major blunder" and led the former prime minister to declare that Eshkol, his own choice for successor, "would have been a great leader and an excellent prime minister if only he were not so lamentably lacking in foresight" and that he was "unfit to govern."[70] Although this episode could not possibly have strengthened Israel's deterrence in the minds of the Arabs, it may have had an important impact on Eshkol's management of two cardinal aspects of national security: the defense budget and the escalating crisis with Syria.

Under Ben Gurion, Israel kept the defense budget within a very rigid framework of not more than roughly 12 percent of GNP. In 1951 this caused

Chief of Staff Yadin to resign his post. Although Ben Gurion liked him and wanted him to stay on, the old man finally accepted the resignation because maintaining the framework of defense outlays was more important. Later this converged with Ben Gurion's existential fears and led him to launch Israel's nuclear program and to resist all U.S. pressures to halt it. By yielding to the pressures of the Johnson administration in this regard, Eshkol, in fact, accepted for the first time in Israel's history a major deviation from the iron rule that economic solvency was just as important as any other, more conspicuous dimension of national security. The repercussions did not surface right away, but in the long run they were of historic magnitude.

Eshkol's second deviation from the Ben Gurion formula for national security had more immediate ramifications. Under Ben Gurion, Israel's use of force against Syria since 1957 had become relatively limited and controlled. Although Syrian shelling and mining in the Galilee Finger and in the vicinity of the Sea of Galilee was quite extensive, Ben Gurion kept a tight rein over Israeli reprisals, apparently in the hope of preventing runaway escalation. In a period of six years he authorized only two important raids on Syrian positions (Tawfiq in January 1960 and Nuqeib in March 1962). Above all, not only did Ben Gurion resist all suggestions of employing air power, but he was even "stingy" (in Ezer Weizman's words) when it came to the authorization of sorties for intelligence purposes.[71]

Under Levi Eshkol, a seemingly far less pugnacious leader than Ben Gurion, this policy changed markedly. Eshkol may have pleased all those Israelis who lamented Ben Gurion's somewhat authoritarian control of the national security system. He was, indeed, a far more democratic leader. But this led to the withering away of the insulation of strategic-military decision making from political debates and, more immediately, to a far greater influence of the military over policymaking. Yitzhak Rabin, the chief of staff; Ezer Weizman, as OC of the IAF and subsequently head of G3 Division (operations) in the General Staff; David Elazar, as OC of the *Gayis* and subsequently of Northern Command—all of them admired Ben Gurion but liked Eshkol. They found him more attentive and, apparently, far more receptive to their policy recommendations.

The policymaking setup, then, had built into it a number of ingredients that must have led, in their ensemble, to a drift toward a far less effective escalation control than during 1957–63. Eshkol's mainstay of support in the cabinet included Golda Meir; the hawkish and opinionated foreign minister, Yigal Allon; the hawkish former commander of the PALMACH who, after fifteen years in the political wilderness, was seething with desire to have an impact on foreign policy and security; and the latter's Achdut Haavodah colleagues. At the same time, Eshkol was constantly attacked by Ben Gurion, Dayan, and Peres for his alleged ineptitude in conducting the nation's security affairs.

Finally, if this cross fire of relativley hawkish advocacies pushed Eshkol to a greater activism than he would have preferred by natural disposition, he was also constantly advised to act vigorously by the IDF General Staff. The officers, to be sure, were honestly convinced that they were doing their very best to advance the national interest. In formal terms they acted properly and honorably. Indeed, they could not even be chided for offering activist advice, since it was their duty to offer the best *military* advice on the assumption that it was the duty of the government, not of the armed forces, to weigh the political pros and cons of military action. An army, after all, should be imbued with an aggressive spirit, or else it cannot be effective on the battlefield. In this sense the IDF General Staff functioned well; the culprit was the prime minister and minister of defense. Unwittingly, no doubt, Eshkol abdicated his responsibility. His understanding of the full political and strategic significance of the IDF's reprisals against Syria seems to have been inadequate. He was unsuccessful in acting as devil's advocate to the suggestions of his military advisers. As a result, he may have authorized actions that—against the background of a conflict with an escalation-prone Syria—only made things worse. To put it even more bluntly, whereas under Ben Gurion—the pugnacious warrior—the IAF had not been authorized to operate ever since April 5, 1951, as soon as Eshkol—the moderate, by all accounts—was at the helm, the IAF was virtually let loose. Whereas under Ben Gurion reprisals against Syria were carried out sparingly by infantry with some artillery support (with the notable exception of the December 10, 1955, attack on Kursi, in which Ben Gurion intended ten or twelve Syrian casualties but Ariel Sharon caused fifty-six to lose their lives),[72] under Eshkol the emphasis was shifted to the awesome triad of artillery, armor, and air power. Finally, whereas Ben Gurion was brilliantly successful in managing the January 1960 Rotem crisis, so that it passed almost unnoticed and is hardly remembered a generation later, Eshkol's mismanagement of the May–June 1967 crisis, his failure to convert the considerable assets of general deterrence that Israel had painstakingly accumulated over the years into effective instruments of specific deterrence, resulted in an epoch-making war.

Deterrence in Crisis: May 1967

On April 7, 1967, following the mounting tensions of the previous years, Israeli and Syrian planes engaged in battle. Six Syrian Migs were shot down. From the Israeli point of view, the main implication was that Syria would be effectively deterred. The logic of this perception appeared flawless: without air cover, the Syrians could not seriously challenge the IDF. An air battle like this constituted a massive demonstration of the fact that Syria had virtually no air cover. If, in addition, Israel would in the future prove to the Syrians time and again in the most abrasive way that they had no air support, the Syrians would remain deterred, and a general war (which Israel did not want) would be averted. Frequent flights over Syria, especially over Damascus, the capital, by French-built Mirage

fighter-bombers with blue stars of David on their wings would underscore Syria's vulnerability and, simultaneously, reinvigorate Israeli deterrence.

In the course of the 1960s this had become, increasingly, the most typical way in which Israeli policymakers came to look at the problem. Unfortunately, what made sense to the Israelis failed to elicit from the Syrians the kind of response that this perspective expected of them. From a Syrian point of view, this situation amounted to a daily reminder of their relative inadequacy vis-à-vis the Israelis. At least as proud as the Israelis, and just as obstinate, the Syrians could not simply yield. What could they do instead? A headstrong military confrontation with Israel without any guaranteed support from other Arab states would lead to a catastrophe. From this point of view, the Syrians were clearly deterred.

But there were other things the Syrians could do in order to demonstrate to the Israelis that they were determined not to give way (in other words, that they were not *entirely* deterred). They could, for example, intensify their small-scale attacks on Israeli civilians in the Huleh valley right below the Golan and thus, in a sense, signal to Israel that this population was hostage to Syria—a means by which to force Israel's hand despite Syria's military inferiority. Experience had demonstrated that for all its military might, Israel had no simple means by which to deter Syria, or anyone else, from employing such a strategy. The maximum Israel could do would be to escalate. If the Jewish state chose to do so, Syria could turn to the rest of the Arab world for support. If the Arab allies, especially Egypt, failed to come to Syria's rescue, Syria could back down from the collision course with Israel and put the blame for that on the rest of the Arabs. If, on the other hand, Egypt and the rest came to Syria's rescue, the escalation could be contained through the creation of a clearly underlined equilibrium. If it came to the worst and there was a war, Syria would not be alone. Indeed, the Syrians might have reasoned that from their point of view it was a "heads I win, tails you lose" situation. They would not fight a war on their own; if there were a war, it would involve Egypt as well. In turn it could be taken for granted that Israeli attention would be focused primarily on Egypt and not on Syria.

Although it cannot be clearly established that these were precisely Syria's calculations during April and May of 1967, Syria clearly did choose to intensify its harassment of the Israeli population near the border, thereby challenging the credibility of the repeated Israeli warning that turning the population into hostages would be unacceptable. Eshkol's cabinet, therefore, decided first to resort to new threats and, if these failed, to initiate some kind of limited tour de force.

The question of which kind of threats to issue was more complicated than was first apparent. The choice was essentially among four types of threats: ominous in tone but vague as to the precise punishment to be administered if the threat were ignored; ominous in tone and specific about the retribution; mild in tone and vague as to the retribution; or, finally, mild in tone but specific about the retribution. Given the background—given, specifically, that milder threats in previous months and years had failed to elicit a satisfactory response from the Syrians—it was clear that if further threats were to be issued, they would have to be stern. At the same time, there were very good reasons for avoiding specificity concerning the nature, scope, location, and timing of the Israeli military action if Syria did not yield to the threats.

For one thing, specificity could lead to pressures from the United States, France, the Soviets, and/or the United Nations to avoid action. Second, it could alert the Syrians and the rest of the Arabs, not only enabling them to prepare but also indicating to them *what* they should prepare in order to thwart any Israeli attempt to "teach Syria a lesson." If Israel were, for example, to offer Syria a specific "price list," indicating what kind of action would follow, say, a small mining incident, a large mining incident, a small shooting incident, or a large one; if Israel were to promise that the punishment would be administered instantly and at the same locations in which the precipitating Syrian action took place, this price list could only make the Syrian task easier. All the Syrians would have to do would be to evaluate in advance which types of actions against Israeli targets were worth their while and which were not. Conversely, if the Syrians were left utterly in the dark as to the timing, location, and scope of possible ripostes, they would have to prepare for a large number of contingencies and would have to assume the worst—namely, that even a small provocation might elicit a large Israeli retribution.

Such were Israel's operational reflexes. The government and the IDF never held elaborate discussions or ever ordered intensive position papers. A brief, almost perfunctory discussion—sometimes even on the telephone—between one or two ministers, the prime minister, the chief of staff, and one or two of his subordinates on the General Staff was more often than not the manner in which a calculus such as this was gone through. In this particular case it led to the issuing by the prime minister and by the IDF spokesman of stern but vague warnings. The former's language in particular was typically oblique. He told the Syrians merely that "the notebook was open and the hand was writing." This seems to have suggested that Israel was keeping count of the incidents and that, ultimately, if and when the Syrians were to initiate more than some unspecified number of incidents involving some unspecified number of casualties or unspecified material damage, Israel would carry out a reprisal on an unspecified scale in an unspecified location. In addition, Eshkol also authorized a limited reinforcement of IDF forces on the Syrian border.

The Israeli moves were undertaken within a more or less routine frame of mind. Egypt was bogged down in the Yemen, and the Syrians did not appear to be a real threat (in terms of basic security) on their own. The worst that could happen, thought the Eshkol government, was a small flare-up of the type that had become almost routine along the Israeli–Syrian armistice lines. This

proved a gross miscalculation. The Syrians apparently feared a more vigorous Israeli response than Israel itself was contemplating. Their apprehensions were reinforced by the Soviets, who—for reasons that have never been explained—also proceeded to alert Egypt. Nasser, in turn, faced a dilemma of his own. On the one hand, this was a golden opportunity to extricate the Egyptian expeditionary force from the Yemen quagmire in which it had been bogged down since the coup d'état of 1962. Egypt could claim a more pressing emergency closer to home and pull out of this hopeless, misguided adventure in the south of the Arabian peninsula.

On the other hand, moving forces into the Sinai could lead to a confrontation with the hypersensitive yet also arrogantly self-assured Israelis (as they may have appeared to the Egyptians). If for fear of this Egypt would not send forces into the Sinai, its position in the Arab world would suffer. Syria would have to back down and would most probably blame this act on the refusal of the Egyptians to offer a helping hand. Hence the most logical move from the Egyptian point of view would be a limited replay of the January 1960 Rotem crisis. A large Egyptian force would enter the Sinai but would stay some distance from UNEF. Israel would then be placed in a difficult situation. If it were to attempt to eject Egypt from the Sinai by force, it would have to cross through UNEF lines and would then be taken to task by the whole world. It was logical to assume, therefore, that the IDF would not move and that the Egyptian army would remain in the Sinai behind UNEF lines. If this could be achieved, Egypt would not only extricate itself from the Yemen but would also appear as Syria's savior; further, it would erase the least palatable consequence of the 1956 war—the de facto demilitarization of the Sinai. In a word, it was not difficult, and certainly not irrational, for Nasser to conclude that the Soviet–Syrian challenge was an opportunity to boost Egypt's declining status without firing a single shot. Accordingly, Nasser ordered the Egyptian army on May 14, 1967, to move a force of several divisions across the Suez Canal into the Sinai.

In the next seventy-two hours Israel missed an opportunity to contain Egypt without war. The tragedy, however, was that this mistake was made not because Eshkol's government wanted a war (as apologists for the Arab cause often argue), and not because it was unconvinced that Israel could win a war, but precisely the reverse: Israel did not want a war and acted with restraint in order to prevent it. Here, Eshkol's sweet reason backfired. Rather than signaling moderation and strength, it projected weakness and indecision, Israel spoke softly and carried a big stick. To Nasser, however, Israel appeared to be speaking softly because it was carrying a hollow reed.

The specifics of this tragic sequence were roughly as follows. During the first week of the crisis, the Egyptian forces in the Sinai did not appear to be deployed purposefully but seemed to be moving in circles in order to "raise dust." This noisy saber rattling reinforced an Israeli inclination to interpret the move as if it were only a show, a mere replay of the 1960 Rotem incident.

Consequently, it seemed prudent not to make too much of it. The IDF was alerted, and some regular units were moved to the south—precisely the same drill as in 1960. In addition, the IDF was ordered to carry out discreetly a small-scale mobilization of reserves and to prepare the ground for a larger mobilization if and when the situation deteriorated. The Egyptians, moreover, were informed through third parties that Israel entertained no aggressive intentions. Prime Minister Eshkol alerted the Knesset security and Foreign Relations committee and ordered the speeding up of some military deliveries from abroad. He also ordered some emergency fund raising in wealthy Jewish communities overseas.

What impression did all this make on the Egyptians? To judge by Nasser's subsequent actions, it seems that Eshkol's strategy either convinced Nasser that the incumbent Israeli prime minister was made of softer fabric than was Ben Gurion, or unwittingly created situations that made it difficult for Nasser not to escalate the crisis. On the face of it, of course, Eshkol merely replayed Ben Gurion's handling of the 1960 crisis, but with two important differences. First, Ben Gurion's handling of the 1960 crisis was singularly discreet. The alert to the IDF was carried out under strict secrecy. Ben Gurion had not even consulted the Knesset Security and Foreign Relations Committee. All he did was to alert the IAF, move the seventh armored brigade of regulars to the Egyptian border, mobilize the thirty-seventh reserve armored brigade, and deploy it in the south as well. Finally, to calm the Arabs, Ben Gurion, nonchalantly let it be known that he was planning a visit to the United States.

The second factor that may have helped Ben Gurion to achieve more deterrence with less overt pressure was his reputation. In fact, it does not seem farfetched to argue that his manner in the course of the 1960 crisis may have been interpreted by Nasser against the background of eight years of encounter with Ben Gurion, during which the Israeli leader had persistently projected an image of utmost resolve. Hence, in 1960 Nasser ordered his 50,000 troops out of the Sinai barely thirty-two hours after the beginning of the crisis.[73] Conversely, Eshkol was reputed to be a far less formidable leader, and his moderation during the first three days of the crisis may have been interpreted by Nasser in the light of this image.

Beyond the problem of images, however, the publicity that attended Eshkol's moves may have made it very difficult for Nasser to back down without some concrete achievement. The bottom line, then, was that Egypt, in Nasser's definition of the situation, not only could but, indeed, almost had no choice but to "nibble" more—that is, to carry on this short-of-war mischief in order to extricate itself from the collision course with more substantial gains. In practical terms, it led Nasser to demand, at 10:00 P.M. on May 16, that UNEF be removed forthwith.

This was Nasser's most critical decision in the course of the entire crisis. Had he avoided this move, his forces might well have stayed in the Sinai, since it is clear that Israel would not have gone to war in order to evict them from their

positions during May 14–16 (Eshkol briefed his government that the 35,000-strong Egyptian force that had crossed the canal on May 15 was deployed in a "defensive" form). Apparently, Nasser counted on the inefficiency of the U.N. decision-making process. Nasser probably believed that the commander of UNEF, General Rikhye of India, would drag his feet. He would pass Nasser's demand on to Secretary-General U Thant. The latter would consult the Security Council. All this would take time, which would enable Egypt to bargain: it could agree to withdraw the demand for UNEF's removal in return for an international legitimization of all the changes in the status quo that his moves since May 14 had created.

If Eshkol had acted with greater vigor but less publicity—initiating a partial mobilization of reserves, concentrating forces along the Egyptian border, and transmitting (through third parties) unambiguous warnings presenting any further Egyptian move as a casus belli—Nasser might have been more careful to avoid such brinksmanship. But Eshkol's cautious, prudent, and conciliatory posture—the fact that he confined himself to precautionary defensive moves and *did not really play deterrence effectively*—turned the Egyptian president's move vis-à-vis the United Nations from a calculated risk into an irreversible slide down the slippery slope leading to war.

Assuming as Eshkol did that Nasser was not ready for war and was merely showing off, U Thant presented Nasser with an all-or-nothing ultimatum: either he was to take back his request for the removal of UNEF or the force would be entirely withdrawn at once. The latter alternative put the onus of the next critical move back on Egypt, which would then have to decide whether or not to move into UNEF's positions.

In reality, because of possible reactions in the Arab world, the Egyptian army was unable *not* to move into UNEF's place. This step, however, would mean the return of the Egyptians to a menacing forward deployment along Israel's border and the reimposition of a naval blockade. Could Egyptian troops sit at Sharm el Sheikh and passively watch Israeli ships sailing right in front of their eyes? How would the Arab world—and Nasser's numerous rivals there—react to that?

Such, apparently, were the considerations that prompted the secretary-general of the United Nations to present the Egyptian president with an all-or-nothing proposition. But could Nasser back down at this stage without suffering serious damage to his prestige? Probably not, unless he could point out that Israel had reacted so vigorously that another move would mean a war, for which—as Nasser had said time and again during the preceding years—the Arabs were not yet ready. Since Eshkol's prudence meant that Israel was acting gingerly, Nasser could not easily extricate himself from this dead end. Indeed, Israel's apparent weakness may have convinced Nasser that he would be able to eject UNEF, erase the shame of 1956, and get away with it without war. To put it very bluntly, if at this moment in the crisis Israel had been less

diplomatic and more determined, and had avoided any publicity, it might, paradoxically, have helped Nasser to back down. If, however, it came to the worst and Nasser did not back down even in the face of a spirited Israeli response, then the outcome would have been the same as it eventually was—all-out war.

By the time Eshkol and his colleagues discovered that a more vigorous reaction was called for, it was already too late. By May 18, 1967, U Thant already had Nasser's reply to his own ultimatum—namely, that UNEF should leave. The secretary-general decided to comply with the Egyptian request, and within five days, on May 23, Egyptian forces were deployed on the Israeli border again and Nasser had declared the reimposition of the naval blockade.

As these events evolved, Israel called up the bulk of the IDF reserves. At first mobilization was selective and undeclared. Within this five-day period, however, it ceased to be a secret and more or less ceased to be selective. The trouble was that despite the great emphasis in the rhetoric of the Eshkol government and especially of IDF Chief of Staff Rabin on deterrence, the manner in which the IDF carried out the mobilization of the reserves suggested that it did not really understand the role of a reserve call-up in the pursuit of deterrence. An unannounced call-up of a significant scale during May 14–16 would have presented Nasser with a picture of utmost Israeli resolve before Egypt itself had gone beyond the point of no return. Conversely, the deterrent impact of the mobilization, one of Israel's most valuable instruments of deterrence in crisis, was squandered by the piecemeal, semiannounced manner in which it was carried out.

Thus by the time the IDF was nearly at a wartime level of mobilization, Egypt had already become irrevocably committed. Nasser's declaration of a new maritime blockade and his subsequent signing of mutual defense agreements with Jordan and Syria came when the Egyptian president had already gone so far that he could not back down without an unacceptable loss of face. Hence the most logical thing for him to do was to try to put the onus of deciding whether or not there would be war on Israel and, simultaneously, to try to build as much as possible of a countervailing force. Assuming, apparently, that the point of no return had been crossed, Nasser attempted to neutralize the Israeli deterrence through intimidating moves of his own. Once it had openly become a gigantic test of nerve and resolve, a large-scale game of brinksmanship, a kind of grand encounter of gladiators in a global arena, it was perfectly rational for Egypt to project the most warlike, ferocious image it could produce. Such an image, Nasser may have reasoned, would either deter Israel from launching a preemptive strike (which would have amounted to a great Egyptian victory) or, at least, maximize Egypt's power and prop up Arab morale to a pitch that would lessen the prospects for an unacceptable Arab defeat.

According to all available accounts, Nasser's reimposition of a maritime blockade turned war—from the Israeli point of view—into a more or less foregone

conclusion. Indeed, as of May 24, 1967, Israel acted on the assumption that deterrence had failed. If Israel had had a defensive second-strike option, the entire picture might have looked different. In the absence of such an option (attributable to Israel's own choices in the realm of force structure and capabilities during the previous decade), the logical corollary to the diagnosis that deterrence had failed was either that the reserves should be demobilized as a means of defusing the crisis (as Ben Gurion proposed) or that first, preemptive, strike was the only method of resolving the crisis in a satisfactory manner from the Israeli point of view (the opinion of the overwhelming majority of the Israeli political elite). Since Ben Gurion was out of power and, in fact, represented a minority of one, the prevailing view, almost without any further deliberation, was that a preemptive strike within a matter of days had become unavoidable.

Accordingly, the rest of the crisis—namely, the period May 24–June 5—shifted the emphasis in Israel to an entirely different focus, which in a sense falls outside the purview of this discussion. One cardinal issue that came to the fore as soon as a preemptive strike was taken for granted was how to maximize international support. This boiled down to two critical desiderata that had not been fulfilled in Israel's previous war (1956). First, when war broke out, it would be important to ensure that Israel's military effort would not be undercut by international pressures. Second, after the fighting it was imperative that the (expected) military victory be converted into a satisfactory political outcome.

Another issue, once the assumption that deterrence had failed was embraced as a starting point, was how to define the war's objectives. Should it be a modest operation designed to lead to the limited acquisition of Egyptian territory, which would subsequently be returned to Egypt in exchange for the retreat of the Egyptian army from the Sinai (as proposed by Chief of Staff Rabin)? Or should the main purpose of an Israeli first strike be to break the back of the Egyptian army as a means of deterring both Egypt and any other Arab state from repeating Nasser's challenge in the future (as proposed by Moshe Dayan)? Or, finally, should it be a combination of both approaches (as proposed by Yigal Allon)?

What ultimately determined the definition of the war's objectives, though not all its actual results, was yet a third topic of intense preoccupation after May 23, 1967—namely, building a domestic array of forces that would undertake to define the objectives of the war, take the onerous decision to launch it, and share the blame if it failed or the domestic political spoils if it was a success. In the course of an intense struggle, Eshkol of MAPAI was forced by grass-roots pressures and anxiety to cede the Ministry of Defense to Dayan of RAFI; Allon of Achdut Haavodah was made to realize that he was no match for Dayan in terms of public esteem; Menachem Begin, hitherto the pariah of Israeli politics, suggested that his lifelong foe, the octogenarian Ben Gurion, be recalled from his Negev retreat; GAHAL (Gush Herut Liberalim, Hebrew for Henut-Liberal bloc), Begin's Knesset following, was invited for the first time in Israel's history to join the cabinet; Golda Meir and the MAPAI old guard suffered a major political defeat; a number of ranking IDF officers were close to resigning their posts in protest against Eshkol's performance; Eban discovered that his own colleagues did not entirely trust his poltical judgment; Rabin, the chief of staff, suffered a nervous breakdown; and, to everyone's great surprise, Ben Gurion, widely regarded as the epitome of the warrior, cautioned against military action. Thus even before the war itself had begun, the Israeli domestic political scene had been dramatically transformed. Israel was clearly on the verge of an entirely new era.[74]

The Second Strategic Package

Compared to the Israeli strategic package of the 1949–56 period, the situation in the decade that elapsed between the Sinai compaign and the Six-Day War clearly constituted a great improvement. The IDF's capabilities kept abreast of the Arabs' despite the breathtaking pace and enormous scope of the regional arms race. Having discovered in the Sinai war of 1956 a doctrine that suited its ethos, mentality, structure, and shortcomings, the IDF proceeded to develop that doctrine to the best of its ability. The most important implications were that a defensive posture was beyond Israel's means, that the only available option was a first-strike posture, and that in the long run even this would not suffice. There might be no escape from a tacit reliance on a last-resort nuclear weapon.

An important reason that these were the most prominent conclusions of Israeli policymakers during this period was the continued failure to integrate Israel into a solid system of alliances. Although the performance of the IDF in the Sinai campaign and Nasser's regional policies together helped change Israel's image from that of a vulnerable liability to an able asset, the Israelis discovered that primary alliances capable of offering a reliable strategic shield were unattainable. Israel could obtain only so-called secondary and tertiary alliances—that is, bonds that ensured a continuing and adequate flow of weapons and strategic materials and that coordinated Israel's efforts to contain the Arabs with the parallel efforts of other powers. Although this was a great improvement in comparison to the pre-1956 period, it was not sufficiently extensive to enable the Jewish state to relax, to decrease its reliance on military power for deterrence purposes, or for that matter to abandon the quest for unconventional forms of strategic insurance.

The failure to enter into solid alliance structures also had an impact on Israel's posture regarding casi belli. Still constantly preoccupied with the impact of their every step on relations with great power patrons, the Israeli[illegible]

not advanced very far beyond their cautious, suboptimal reliance on this instrument of deterrence in the previous period. The government had a clear idea of which changes in the status quo would constitute a threat. Government spokesmen would make these casi belli public. But although a bold publication of the entire inventory was incessantly advocated (by Allon, for example), such a step was not taken prior to the Six-Day War. The Arabs were led to understand what would be unacceptable, but Israel would not tie its own hands to irrevocable commitments. Small wonder, then, that the Arab confrontation states constantly prodded Israel's resolve in a variety of ways. In the case of Syria, this resulted in rampant escalation. Egypt also tried once, in 1960, and, having established the limits of Ben Gurion's patience, was irresistibly tempted to try again in 1967 in order to find out what Eshkol's threshold would be.

The same reluctance to announce a clear position was also apparent in Israel's stance concerning the use of force. The IDF's capabilities left the Jewish state without a defensive second-strike option. Instead of turning necessity into a virtue—instead of announcing a first-strike posture boldly and repeatedly as a means of deterring the adversaries from any hasty moves—Israel left the issue undetermined until a moment of crisis. The political and national security elites of Israel, its friends in the West, and almost certainly the Arab states knew after the 1956 war that if Israel's security margins were infringed on, an Israeli first strike would be almost automatic. Since this posture was deliberately muffled, a dangerous residue of ambiguity and doubt remained in the minds of all concerned—first of all the Arabs. This, arguably, did not strengthen the Israeli deterrence but somewhat compromised it.

Not so with regard to Israel's clear preference during this period for a strategy of massive retaliation. This had become almost an instinct with the Israelis. The Arabs were fully familiar with it in the course of the 1953–56 period were not allowed to forget it in subsequent years. Did this strengthen Israel's deterrence? The answer seems to be that it did so far less than many Israeli policymakers had led themselves to believe. On many occasions such a strategy was virtually unavoidable because Israel could not allow its adversaries a strategy of slow bleeding. In this sense the Israeli preference for a large-scale showdown over protracted attrition remained as logical as it had been before. During the 1957–67 decade this logic was often carried to an unnecessary excess, for which Israel itself was the first to pay the price.

In this respect there was a clear difference between the first six years of the package and the remaining four. Under Ben Gurion, escalation control was apparently more effective than under Eshkol. In this sense the domestic political setup seems to have exerted a far-reaching impact on strategic choices and performance. As a result of the changing decision-making structure after Ben Gurion's retirement from the premiership, Israel's own policies hastened the escalation that led to the crisis of May–June 1967. When it came to

managing the crisis itself, domestic politics once again influenced strategic behavior more than was either necessary or, indeed, beneficial. Thus the period since the retirement of Ben Gurion foreshadowed many important developments in the post-1967 era.