Deterrence without the Bomb

The Politics of Israeli Strategy

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Preface

In the early 1980s I was asked to attend an academic discussion at the Israel Defense Forces' National Defense College. The participants were experienced colonels and brigadier-generals who had become students at this prestigious academy either at the end of a distinguished career or on their way to further promotion. Their discussion was lively and stimulating. It projected tremendous sensitivity to the complexities and constraints of real life. Hence it was truly educational and rewarding for an academic like me. Yet, for all these virtues, the discussion also reflected a certain lack of clarity concerning the overall landscape of Israel's national security policy. The participants were at their best in analyzing the specifics of tactical and technical problems. But their ability to rise above the commonplace platitudes of a social evening seemed limited whenever it came to a macro evaluation of trends.

Such an impression led me to make some inquiries into the college's syllabus and required reading. To my astonishment, I discovered that there was no authoritative text on Israel's single most important problem. To be sure, the wealth of literature on specific aspects of Israeli national security policy was stunning—and has become even more so. But the students in what constitutes Israel's advanced school of national security studies—not to mention ordinary students at Israeli or other universities—had no text on which to rely for an up-to-date evaluation of the single most important problem in their life.

Before long, this increased awareness of a major lacuna steered me toward a search for an organizing concept in which to encase a university course and, subsequently, a written study. The concept of *national security* is perceived in Israel in almost all-encompassing terms. Hence a study of the Israeli experience that attempted to rely on this concept as a guide could last for a decade and result in a volume so large that almost no publisher would print it and few potential readers would be able to afford it. Clearly there was a need for a narrower concept emphasizing that part of Israel's national security policy wherein military tactics, strategic doctrines, and political processes meet. As I proceeded with the preliminary research, it increasingly dawned on me that

such a focus could be found in an application to the materials of the Israeli experience of the essentially universal concept of deterrence.

While I was still wondering about the pros and cons of such a project, I was confronted by another important stimulus for pursuing this study. In January 1982 I was invited by Professor Michael Brecher of McGill University to prepare a paper on the topic of international crises for presentation at the twelfth annual conference of the International Political Science Association (IPSA), which took place in August of that year. Entitled "Deterrence and Crisis in a Protracted Conflict: The Case of Israel," the paper was my first written attempt to collect my thoughts on the topic.[1]

Fortunately the discussants of the presentations at the panel were two leading authorities on international relations and strategic studies: Professor Dina Zinnes of the University of Illinois and Professor Alexander L. George of Stanford University. In her comments Professor Zinnes drew my attention to the need for a broader theoretical and comparative framework for my specific research on Israel. Professor George seemed to have broadly endorsed my expanded interpretation of the meaning of conventional deterrence as well as my application of this notion to the minutiae of the Israeli experience. This encouraging response converged with friendly and supportive advice from Professor Brecher—probably the single most important contributor to the study of Israel's experience as an international actor. In a word, by the autumn of 1982 I had ample evidence that I was onto a very promising project.

At this stage I engaged in a more sustained attempt to appraise the state of the art of the study of conventional deterrence. It did not take long to discover that as a result of the outstanding contribution of Alexander L. George and Richard Smoke in their 1974 study of *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy*[2] and the important integration and reappraisal of deterrence theory by Patrick Morgan three years later,[3] the sensitivity of scholars to the complexities of conventional deterrence was growing. It also seemed clear, however, that the field was dominated by U.S. scholars, who could not help being overwhelmingly influenced by their nation's concerns, cultural heritage, and recent international experience.

More specifically, the culture-bound nature of the study of deterrence up to that time was reflected in four debatable underlying assumptions:

1. That deterrence is primarily a test of nerve and intelligence in the course of brief and spasmodic crises.

2. That deterrence is not a complex political process involving whole nations but essentially a confrontation between two relatively small-decision-making units.

3. That deterrence typically requires a rough symmetry in power between the parties.

4. That deterrence is an absolute phenomenon: either it completely succeeds or it completely fails.

Somewhat uncomfortable with all four assumptions, I found myself shifting the emphasis in my own emerging study to the *problématique* of pursuing deterrence in the long haul; to the impact of power asymmetry on the dynamics of deterrence; to the complexities of pursuing deterrence against the background of a lively domestic political debate; and, above all, to the relative, sequential, and fragile nature of deterrence. By following this path, I may have overemphasized the peculiarities of the Israeli experience. Nevertheless, along with a growing community of armchair strategists who rely extensively on data from Arab–Israeli wars, I remain convinced that at least some of the lessons of the Israeli experience have a far wider application than is apparent at first glance.

Having gone through such an attempt at adapting elements of the general theory of deterrence to the specific study of Israeli strategy, I then evolved my own research design and proceeded to address the case of Israel in detail. At this stage I had to make two important methodological decisions. The first related to the choice between the intensive case study approach and the extensive bird's-eye view. Since Michael Brecher had done wonders in studying Israel through case studies,[4] and since I wanted to emphasize the less familiar *problématique* of general, long-term deterrence, my choice was the bird's-eye view plus one illustrative case study. The main cost that this entailed was that I had to cut many historical corners, so to speak. But as I do not see this study as a definitive history, I am inclined to think that the bird's-eye view paid off. It shifted the emphasis to continuities and changes over time and, in doing so, also provided a comprehensive survey that students and less well informed readers could use.

My second decision related to the manner of presenting the key concepts. There were two alternatives, one "vertical" and one "horizontal." The first was to take each set of key questions—for instance, the question of capabilities—and study it vertically—that is, longitudinally from 1949 to the present. I tried this method in the first draft of this study and in a brief article that was published in Hebrew.[5] Having gone through these experiments, however, I came to the conclusion that it would be preferable to maintain the wholeness of distinct historical periods. Hence the core of the present study falls into four "horizontal" or chronological parts (1949–56, 1957–67, 1967–73, and 1974–84), each of these parts being subdivided "vertically" or conceptually. Looking back at my decision, I feel confident that this method saved the study from the misfortune of excessive fragmentation—from becoming an obscure theory that only specialists would be able to comprehend.

This phase of trial and error yielded three additional journal and book articles[6] and one sizable monograph,[7] in which I tested a variety of ideas and a number of alternative methods of presentation. It also resulted in—and greatly

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Deterrence Theory and Israeli Strategy

The Problem

Deterrence is the be all and end all of Israeli strategy. It is celebrated as a central concept in numerous statements on national security affairs by Israeli politicians, officials, intellectuals, and professional officers alike. It is mentioned ad nauseam in manuals, brochures, and orders of the day of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). It is, in the words of one observer, "the most commonly used" term "of the jargon of strategic studies," an "integral part of the vocabulary of the public debate"[1]; an article of faith; an ultimate, undisputed yardstick by which performance is evaluated; the single most important rationale for launching military operations; the organizing concept inspiring definitions of situations, of goals, of achievements, and of failures. To prevent its perceived depreciation, Israel went to war in 1956; launched endless "reprisals" during the 1950s and 1960s; went to war again in 1967; escalated the war of attrition on the banks of the Suez Canal during 1968–70; seized additional parts of the Syrian Golan plateau and of Egyptian territory in the latter stages of the 1973 war; raided Entebbe airport in faraway Uganda; bombed the nuclear reactor Osiraq near Baghdad, the capital of Iraq; escalated the struggle with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in Lebanon during the 1970s; went into Lebanon in 1982 and withdrew from Lebanese territory in the course of 1983–85.

Yet, for all the fervor with which Israelis speak about deterrence and act in its name, many apparently have only a dim appreciation of what deterrence is all about. What does it entail in the specific context in which Israel pursues it? How does a strategy of deterrence and, most particularly, of conventional deterrence differ from an ordinary defensive posture in terms of force structure, deployment, and military hardware? What does such a strategy entail in terms of threat articulation? How does it affect the Jewish state's relations with third parties, in particular with those—both in the Middle East and beyond—whose interests converge with Israel's? What does a strategy of deterrence boil down to in terms of the employment of force? Does every resort to

force signal a failure of deterrence (as it no doubt would in any instance of a resort to nuclear force), or should a strategy of conventional deterrence assume a more flexible definition of failure and success? How does a small power such as Israel maximize the efficacy of its general, long-term deterrence without periously compromising its ability to cope with the problem of specific deterrence in the course of brief but highly dangerous crises? How does Israel's domestic political setup affect its ability to project a viable deterrence? Above all, is Israel really capable of resisting the abiding attraction of a nuclear panacea?

Questions like these are difficult to answer because of the thicket of secrecy that has shrouded the making of Israel's national security policy. However, Israel is an open society in which national security issues are openly, and often hotly, aired in public. Consequently, a great deal of valuable information is available, at least to observers with a good command of the Hebrew language. Nonetheless, it ought to be assumed as a matter of course that whereas the bulk of the less important data has already become public property, a significant portion of the most important information has not become available—and most probably will not. Hence any study of Israel's national security policy remains, at least to some extent, a tentative exercise—a matter of deduction and perhaps even conjecture.

A second, and perhaps far more significant, difficulty that faces anyone attempting to investigate Israel's national security policy is a conceptual one. The questions regarding the Jewish state that have been posed here subsume, in their ensemble, a wider unifying query: *What is conventional deterrence?* Although the subject has been addressed in recent years by a growing number of distinguished scholars[2]—although, indeed, the notion itself is, as the late Raymond Aron once pointed out, "as old as humanity"[3]—it nevertheless remains one of the least developed areas of contemporary strategic theory. The scope and nature of this lacuna were identified with characteristic perceptiveness by Alexander L. George:

Though the practice of deterrence in interstate relations goes back to ancient times, theorizing about deterrence is a relatively recent phenomenon. The problem of deterrence took on new urgency in modern times with the advent of thermonuclear weapons and long-range delivery systems. Yet, it is surprising how slowly deterrence theory, and even clarity about the concept, developed after World War II. At first, deterrence was understood and conveyed in relatively simple terms. The doctrine of "massive retaliation" was invented by the Eisenhower administration in an effort to use the threat of strategic nuclear air power to deter not only a Soviet strategy attack but a variety of lesser encroachments on the Free World. Massive Retaliation, however, was subjected to increasing criticism as Soviet capabilities grew and as its lack of relevance to low-level conflicts was demonstrated. Accordingly, the Kennedy administration and its successors moved to refine deterrence strategy and to differentiate

its requirements for different types and levels of conflict. By the late 1960s, deterrence theory and practice were proceeding on several levels.

It is now necessary to reconceptualize the problem of deterrence somewhat differently for different levels of conflict. These are (1) the deterrent relationship of the two superpowers' strategic forces to each other; (2) the deterrence of local and limited conflicts; and (3) the deterrence of "sublimited" conflict at the lower end of the spectrum of violence.

The first of these three levels has received the greatest attention in deterrence theory at the strategic level. . . . The quantity and quality of deterrence theory falls off sharply and steadily for the second and third levels. Deterrence theory at these levels remains relatively underdeveloped and is ridden with difficult problems both of conceptualization and methodology. Largely because deterrence theory at the strategic level, dealing as it does with a relatively simple structural situation was so much better developed, theorists were tempted to employ the logic of strategic deterrence as the paradigm case for thinking about deterrence in general. This has proven to be quite unsatisfactory, however, for there are major differences in the problem of applying deterrence effectively at the second and third levels of conflict. Deterrence at those levels is much more context-dependent than at the strategic level, i.e. it is subject to the play of many more variables that change from one situation to another and, moreover, that are likely to be unstable over time for a particular situation.

As a result, not only are the requirements for deterrence often more complicated for the second and third levels of conflict, they are also more difficult to identify reliably and more difficult to meet. As historical experience amply demonstrates, conflicts at the second and third levels of violence are less easily deterred than the initiation of a strategic nuclear strike. And yet, by far the largest volume of conflict-related developments in other parts of the world with which U.S. foreign policy has attempted to deal lie at the lower end of the spectrum. Many of these low-level conflicts are essentially nondeterrable, or are irrelevant to these conflict situations.

What this brief review of the intellectual history of deterrence theory highlights, therefore, is that theorists have not had much success in extending the logic of deterrence from the simplest strategic case to the more complex cases at the second and third levels. The problems of deterrence at these levels cannot be squeezed into the analytical and policy framework of the logic of strategic deterrence.[4]

Chronologically, deterrence theory is just about as old as the Jewish state. Its real coming of age, so to speak, occurred in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when Israel already had behind it a long history of ferocious conflict. Differently stated, even if the emerging body of deterrence theory were more developed, the fruits of such an intellectual endeavor would still have been of little immediate value to the Israelis during the crucial formative years of Israeli strategy. This is all the more so because Western thinking on conventional deterrence

really has been as underdeveloped as George argues, whereas the Israelis have meanwhile accumulated nearly four decades of experience.

Indeed, one of the principal theses of this study is that, broadly speaking, the Israelis have not been unsuccessful in finding answers to the questions raised earlier. Their success, however, has been more practical than intellectual. Lacking any mature body of theory to draw on, skeptical of the utility of clearly spelled-out doctrines, and faced in quick succession with formidable challenges requiring immediate responses, Israeli policymakers groped for answers and ideas incrementally, haphazardly, and often inconsistently. Gradually a set of assumptions and operational reflexes evolved, which taken together added up to a discernible theory of deterrence based on conventional weapons.

Impressive as this achievement may have been, however, it was not accompanied by a similar success in articulating and in critically evaluating the Israelis' own actions. They may have been acting on an implicit theory, but so far they have been slow in spelling it out. The result is not only a glaring absence of any direct Israeli contribution to the development of a general theory of conventional deterrence, but also, arguably, some damage to Israel itself. The eminently practical inclination of the authors and architects of Israel's implicit concept of deterrence has been its principal source of strength. Over the years, however, it has also become an important source of weakness, leading to intellectual inertia and, inevitably, to serious fallacies, costly blunders, and entrenched misperceptions.

The purpose of this discussion is not, however, to investigate Israeli failures or, indeed, to hail Israel's successes. Rather, the objective is to state explicitly the main elements of Israel's implicit theory of conventional deterrence, to trace principal trends in the emergence of this strategic concept, to identify the main factors leading to both continuity and change, and to search for clues to this strategy's future thrust.

With such a diachronic emphasis, this study differs somewhat from previous investigations of similar themes, which often sought deliberately to play down the evolutionary, historical dimension. Nevertheless, in the final analysis, the purpose here is not so much to exhaust the historical record as it is to underline, illuminate, and explain through a detailed survey of the particular Israeli experience the rich complexity of a strategy of conventional deterrence in general. The history of the Israeli quest for conventional deterrence, then, is treated as a case study from which broader generalizations may perhaps be subsequently deduced. Given the paucity of advanced theoretical work on the topic of conventional deterrence, however, and given the fact that—to put it bluntly—important parts of the theoretical groundwork of the topic have yet to be laid, it is necessary to preface the discussion of the specifics of the Israeli experience with a brief statement of some guiding hypotheses.

The Essence of Deterrence

Deterrence has been variously defined. To one scholar it is "a calculated attempt to induce an adversary to do something, or refrain from doing something, by threatening a penalty for non-compliance." To another writer it appears to be a situation in which "State A seeks to prevent State B from doing Z by threatening B with unacceptable costs if it does Z." A third definition presents deterrence as an "inducement of another party . . . to refrain from a certain action by means of a threat that this action will lead the threatener . . . to inflict retaliation of punishment. . . . In other words, deterrence is persuading the deterred that his own interest compels him to desist from committing a certain act."5

The differences between these three definitions are evidently more a matter of style and semantics than of substance. In this sense they are not unique. Almost all definitions of the term in legions of books and articles on the topic say more or less the same thing: to deter is to dissuade an adversary from doing harm or, more broadly, to alter the adversary's strategic calculus so as to make it more compatible with the deterrer's own interests. This alteration is normally sought by threatening to administer a penalty. Occasionally, however, deterrence is pursued in a more sophisticated manner that brandishes not only a big stick, but also a sweet carrot: the attempt to shape the adversary's calculus relies not only on the threat of punishment, but also on an offer of rewards.

It follows, then, that the conventional variety of deterrence means the combination of four necessary conditions:

1. It is a state policy.
2. It is designed to dissuade adversaries from committing acts deemed harmful by the defender.
3. It seeks to achieve its purpose either through the threat of retribution or through a combination of threatened retributions and promised rewards.
4. Such retribution as is threatened would be carried out by a variety of *diplomatic, economic, and psychological measures but also, above all, by armed forces relying exclusively on conventional weapons.*

To the extent that one can speak of a "common wisdom" concerning conventional deterrence, it is the acceptance of the logic of the foregoing definition but the restriction of its application to the all-important yet somewhat narrow military aspects. Thus a recent study identified three alternative approaches to the topic. The first postulates that a conventional deterrent is effective when defensive weapons predominate in the arsenals of the adversaries. Conversely, this approach suggests, deterrence is likely to fail if both adversaries emphasize offensive weaponry. Offensive weapons, in this view, combine firepower and mobility in roughly equal proportions. Defensive weapons,

on the other hand, stress firepower at the expense of mobility. A tank is thus an offensive weapon par excellence, whereas a field gun is a typical defensive weapon. If the parties to a conflict rely on stationary weapons, deterrence is likely to succeed. Conversely, if the adversaries emphasize their offensive capabilities, deterrence is likely to fail.

The second approach to conventional deterrence questions the contention that weapons can be classified as either inherently offensive or defensive. Instead, this approach draws attention to the balance of forces between adversaries as the critical variable determining whether or not a conventional deterrent will work. Analyses falling into this category consider indicators such as the number of tanks, soldiers, pieces of artillery, and aircraft in the possession of the adversaries and proceed to add them up to composite, and presumably comparable, force ratios. More sophisticated analyses of this type take the quality of weapons into account by weighing the relative value of different categories of weapons as well as differences within a given category. The main proposition on which this second approach is predicated is that "deterrence fails when the attacker has superiority in men and arms. Conversely, deterrence is expected to obtain when there is a rough equality in the size of the opposing forces."

If the type-of-strategy school (the first approach) is taken to task because of the difficulty of classifying weapons, the balance-of-forces school (the second approach) has been criticized for its inability to account for cases—like Israel's preemption of Egypt in 1967—in which a country possessing a far smaller military force was not deterred by its adversary's seeming superiority. The key to a stable conventional deterrence, a more recent third school argues, must be sought in the strategic concept by which the adversaries are informed. Broadly speaking, this argument continues, there are three distinct types of conventional strategic postures: blitzkrieg, attrition, and limited gains. A strategy of *blitzkrieg* emphasizes *moving* (or *striking*) power. A strategy of *attrition* emphasizes *staying* power. A *limited-gains* strategy rests on the assumption that the optimal solution lies in the *combination of staying and moving power.*

When adversaries are informed by the same strategic concept, this third approach to the topic further contends, deterrence is likely to succeed. Thus, if the parties to a conflict base their military posture on the anticipation of a blitzkrieg or a war of attrition or a sequence of assaults for limited gains, they do not entertain a high expectation of making a worthwhile gain in the event of war. The parties will therefore be mutually deterred. If, however, the adversaries adopt contrasting strategic concepts, then deterrence is very likely to fail.[6]

Each of these contending views of conventional deterrence addresses at least one important dimension of the problem. If adversaries spend most of their resources on constructing shelters and trenches rather than on tanks, mobile artillery, and air power, they are not very likely to initiate a war. Conversely, if adversaries have no strategic depth and no defenses worthy of the name, and

emphasize instead their war-winning capabilities, then it makes no sense for either to permit its opponent the privilege of launching a preemptive strike. The parties to such a conflict are in fact locked into what game theorists call a prisoners' dilemma: they would avoid preemption if only they could be certain that the other party would avoid it too. Assuming that a heavy premium is paid on preemption, however, they are inclined to suspect that their opponent would not be able to resist the temptation to preempt. The only logical operative conclusion to which this kind of calculus could lead is that the sooner one preempts, the safer it will be (from its point of view).

The type-of-strategy approach illuminates this deadly logic when it touches on an important aspect of deterrence at the medium, nonnuclear, level of violence. Moreover, it seems equally plausible to contend, as the balance-of-forces school does, that the perceived balance of forces has a critical impact on the calculi of countries in conflict. If the adversary appears weaker and the existence of a real bone of contention is taken for granted, then it makes ample sense to launch a war.

Paradoxically, it also makes sense to launch a preemptive strike when the adversary appears more powerful. Under such circumstances, a successful surprise attack adds a critical increment of power, so to speak, to the weaker party. Given the fact that conflicts breed arms races and that arms races are dynamic, the prospects for a simultaneous and mutual acknowledgment of the existence of a stable equilibrium are therefore dim, as are the prospects for a stable mutual deterrence.

Finally, the choice-of-strategy argument raises at least two important points: first, that the real test of a conventional deterrence posture lies in its ability to dissuade an opponent from resorting to less than all-out wars of the attrition and limited-gains varieties, and, second, that the choice of the same strategy by both parties to the conflict lessens the prospects of deterrence failures. At the same time, however, this third approach, like the other two schools of thought it criticizes, appears to oversimplify the problem of conventional deterrence. Deriving their hypotheses from a paradigm of deterrence that emerged from studies of nuclear conflicts, assuming as they do that conventional deterrence "is directly linked to battlefield outcomes," they lead inadvertently to an excessive fascination with the minutae of battlefield strategems and, more broadly, to the naked display of military force.

Such "micro" military concepts of conventional deterrence rob the topic of some of its most essential features. It becomes virtually indistinguishable from that posture which, since time immemorial, has been known as defense. Unaware as it is of the fact that deterrence, "the negative aspect of political power," is "a function of the *total* cost-gain expectation of the party to be deterred,"[7] the choice-of-strategy approach—no less than the two earlier approaches, which it criticizes—pays only lip services to the political and psychological dynamics whose interplay ultimately determines whether or not

deterrence will obtain. It does not address the basic question of why states should choose to base their national security on deterrence rather than on alternative types of national strategy. It has little to say about the role of alliances in the pursuit of deterrence; about the intricate *problématique* of manipulating the adversary's behavior through the studied dissemination of threats; about the impact of domestic politics on the style and outcome of a deterrence strategy; about the importance of accommodative political gestures in changing the adversary's strategic calculus; or, for that matter, about the complexities of deterring guerrillas and managing deterrence in episodes dominated by naval and air warfare. In a word, though formulated after George's critique, just quoted, of the state of the art, the choice-of-strategy approach pays only scant attention to the former's wise and perceptive advice and leaves the problem of conventional deterrence almost as unattended as it had been previously. What, then, is the essence of conventional deterrence?

The beginning of wisdom in any attempt to comprehend conventional deterrence is the recognition that it is not just another word for what, since time immemorial, has been called defense. Rather, it is a mode of behavior unto itself—a distinct, perhaps even *generic*, type of macrostrategic posture. It may involve a great deal of strategic-military maneuvering, but it is not merely a question of battlefield stratagems. It entails a complex array of decision-making processes at a great variety of levels, but it is not merely an exercise in rational decision making. It is inseparably linked to the construction, training, equipping, and displaying of military capabilities, but it is far more than the balancing of naked military forces. It is, rather, a complex combination of all these factors and far more. It is a state of mind, an image both of oneself and of the adversary, a disposition, an organizing concept, a conceptual beacon in the light of which governments organize their efforts in the field of national security. In a word, deterrence is very nearly a special form of what Sir Basil Liddell Hart called a "grand strategy."[8]

Defining the scope of deterrence in such wide-ranging and inclusive terms, however, is not the same as identifying it with national security policy as a whole. Critical as it may be in the final analysis, deterrence is no more than one part of the total field of national security. Although this caveat should not be forgotten, it still remains plausible to contend that the very choice of a deterrence posture has a significant bearing on a whole range of other national choices. It impinges on the allocation of resources; on the structure and deployment of military force; on the specifics of military doctrine; on the choice of allies; on the articulation, dissemination, and signaling to the adversary of both accommodating inducements and assertive threats; on the preferences of when and how force should be employed; and even on the style, texture, and pace of the domestic political process.

In all these respects, *deterrence* is related to, but should not be confused with, two equally distinct alternative types of international disposition—*defense*

and *offense*. The heart of the distinction between these three mutually exclusive types lies in their fundamentally different alignment of *political ends* with *military means*. An offensive posture should by no means be confused with the operational doctrine of the armed forces. Rather, it too, like deterrence and defense, constitutes a grand strategy, an all-embracing outlook emphasizing an attitude toward the world at large *as well as* a specific military doctrine. As the case of Nazi Germany suggests, an offensive posture starts from a fundamental, deep-seated dissatisfaction (whose origins may be ideological, irredentist, or both) with the prevailing international status quo, at least in the nation's immediate international vicinity.[9] It therefore advocates an international reshuffle. In turn it leads to an emphasis on a military capability with which to carry out such a program. The ends of such a program are pervasively offensive, as are its choice of military means. Such as international actor, to use the language of the choice-of-strategy approach, invests the bulk of its resources in the construction of the largest possible blitzkrieg capability.

A defensive national posture—for instance, that of Czechoslovakia during the interwar period—means precisely the opposite. It, too, constitutes a grand strategy. Its ultima ratio, however, is preservative in the most fundamental sense. Based on satisfaction with the international order as it is, it would not lead to the investment of any resources—least of all military resources—in an endeavor to change this order.[10] Therefore, it leads to a defensive military doctrine with an emphasis on staying power, and not—as in the case of an offensive posture—on moving (or striking) power. In the battlefield conditions of the twentieth century, this means an emphasis on fortifications, civil defense, antiaircraft capability, and coastal defenses, and a marked preference for antitank capability and stationary artillery over mobile armored "fists" combining movement and fire.

A national defensive posture as defined here is not readily distinguishable from what Glenn H. Snyder once described (with reference to nuclear conflicts) as "deterrence by denial."[11] The main reason that the two terms are not as mutually exclusive is that the best form of deterrence is, arguably, a good defense.[12] A nation that is capable of generating sufficient military force to envelop itself permanently within a robust defensive wall, as the Chinese apparently assumed millennia ago, deters effectively by its evident ability to thwart almost any type of conventional attack. This is, of course, an ideal type, which does not exist in the real world of today and may have seldom existed in the past. But it seems to underline the basic conceptual difference between real or generic deterrence, on the one hand, and a dissuading image derived from alternative strategies (such as defense), on the other hand.

Deterrence in its purest form, then, is fundamentally distinct from both defense and offense. While combining elements of both these classical postures, it constitutes a category unto itself. Informed by a basic satisfaction with the prevailing international order, it is defensive in its overriding political ends. At

the same time, it is offensive in its choice of military means.[13] This somewhat incongruous strategic-political posture is intrinsically complex, if not in the longer term counterproductive. Entailing as it does the simultaneous pursuit of both an aggressive and a peace-loving international image, it inevitably leads to charges of duplicity. It is escalatory by its very nature. It leads to tensions with one's allies abroad and friction with one's political constituency at home. In short, it is an imperfect posture, one that a nation adopts reluctantly only if and when all other alternatives appear even less attractive.

In more concrete terms, deterrence is typically the strategic posture of weaker parties. The logic of this hypothesis runs as follows. If nation A (Gnomeland) faces an adversary, B (Giantland), whose war potential is perceived to be significantly superior, then the defending power, A, has no viable defensive option. If Gnomeland deploys its forces in fortified positions along its entire frontier, it is bound to be outnumbered, outgunned, and easily overwhelmed at almost any point along the boundary with Giantland. Confronted with such a predicament, Gnomeland has no logical alternative but to fall back on an inherently offensive military doctrine that stresses, and by its very nature facilitates, preemption; at the very least, it calls for the allocation of offensive force to specific theaters of operation only after the detection of Giantland's main effort. Given the imbalance between the weaker Gnomeland and the more powerful Giantland, even an offensive military doctrine may well constitute an inadequate deterrent. Knowing this, however, does not alter the fact that for Gnomeland, the weaker party in the conflict, an offensive military doctrine is more logical than a defensive one.

The contention that deterrence in its offensive form is a posture of necessity and not of choice suggests two more important postulates. First, it is never a question of having a deterrent or not having one but, rather, a matter of relative efficacy. The realistic purpose of a strategy of conventional deterrence is not to prevent hostilities altogether but, rather, *to maximize a nation's projection of power in order to minimize its need to resort to force.* The relation of a nation's deterrent to its objective capabilities is in this sense analogous to the relation of the productive capacity of a firm to the value of its shares on the stock market. A ceaseless, long-term process of influence, deterrence is inherently given to failures. It is a relative, contextual, flimsy, nimble, and elusive quality—a stock in a tumultuous threat exchange rather than a palpable commodity in a stable market.

Notwithstanding this inherently enigmatic nature of deterrence, it is plausible to posit the existence of four basic degrees of deterrent efficacy; *firm, stable, vulnerable,* and *fragile*. When the adversaries in a dyad—say, the United States and the Soviet Union—are of roughly equal strength and both possess nuclear weapons, deterrence is most (though by no means entirely) effective. As Robert Jervis has pointed out, this is not a matter of policy but a fact: "No amount of flexibility, no degree of military superiority at levels less than all-out war,

can change the fundamental attribute of the nuclear age. Not only can each side destroy the other if it chooses, but that outcome can grow out of conflict even if no one wants it to. Most dilemmas of U.S. policy," argues Jervis, "stem from the vulnerability of its cities, not from policies which might permit the Soviets marginal military advantage in unlikely and terribly risky contingencies. Once each side can destroy the other, any crisis brings up the possibility of this disastrous outcome."[14]

The awesome and overbearing influence of nuclear capabilities also operates quite effectively (though possibly less so than in the previous case) when one of the parties is substantially weaker (say, France versus the Soviet Union). This is an instance of so-called limited deterrence, which (along with other factors) has inspired the French to develop their *force de dissuasion*. A nuclear capability in such a case acts as an equalizer or at least as a power multiplier. It assists the minor adversary in narrowing the gap in power potentials through the deployment of a massive, albeit partial, capability to punish.[15]

A third and still lesser degree of stability obtains in conflicts in which neither party has a nuclear capability but both are roughly of the same strength (say, India versus China before either had acquired nuclear weapons). The absence of a nuclear capacity makes for a substantial depreciation in the stability of mutual deterrence. Losing a war becomes an acceptable proposition, and no move is likely to lead to irreversible consequences (except, perhaps, for the individuals who make the decision to launch the war and, certainly, for the soldiers who lose their lives on the battlefield). In such a context, it should be emphasized, the impact and the weight of the political, nontechnological, and nonmilitary intangibles such as morale and domestic cohesion on the credibility of the nation's deterrent increases immeasurably. Whereas in nuclear balances the mainstay of mutual deterrence is the blind and, in itself, nonpolitical destructive potential of weapons systems, in conventional conflicts no amount of hardware can utterly insulate the efficacy of a deterrent from the impact of a whole gamut of "soft" political intangibles.

To argue in this vein is not, however, to say that numbers, technology, strategic concepts, and the like do not count. When neither party possesses nuclear weapons, and when the parties are significantly unequal in their overall war-making potentials, the deterrent of Gnomeland, the weaker party, is more likely to be less effective. It is then that reliance on an offensive posture even though the overriding purpose is the preservation of the status quo becomes an inescapable necessity. It is also then that an effective deterrent is difficult to obtain. This most vulnerable fourth category is what was described earlier as the generic or prototypical deterrence.

Moreover, the inferiority or weakness that renders deterrence, fragile as it may be, an existential imperative, a nation's only realistic strategic and political posture, stems not only from *objective* liabilities like size and strength, but at least as much from somewhat more *idiosyncratic* sources of weakness, such

as the type of regime. Open, pluralistic societies tend to subordinate foreign policy to domestic needs. Closed, totalitarian or authoritarian regimes, on the other hand, often have their priorities in the opposite order.[16] The difference, however, may not be so conspicuous in the course of a war or even in the course of a crisis when war appears imminent. Judging by the British and Soviet experiences during World War II, both open and closed societies tend to pull themselves together in the face of adversity. Conversely, the difference between open and closed societies in terms of their order of priorities is underlined over the long-run "normal" conduct of their external affairs. Closed societies are prone to exhibit a high degree of mobilization, regimentation, and consequently military outlays. By contrast, open societies have a built-in preference for keeping military expenditures to the bare minimum. They are the underachievers of the international system with respect to their ability to play the system's game of power. In all but the most extreme situations of adversity, in other words, their potential military power tends to be greater than their actual projection of power.[17]

The logical corollary of this hypothesis is as follows: when an open, pluralistic society faces a closed, authoritarian or totalitarian opponent in a protracted conflict, a certain imbalance in actual capabilities is bound to occur, even if the ultimate war potentials of the two parties are the same. The result may be an intriguing paradox: the "open" party, though more likely by its very nature to be satisfied with the status quo, is impelled to emphasize an offensive military doctrine (namely, deterrence); its closed, totalitarian or authoritarian adversary, on the other hand, feels free to adopt a defensive posture. To be sure, it may well be an overstatement to argue that deterrence—as defined here—is *only* the choice of democracies. But it seems a plausible hypothesis that democracies are more prone than nondemocratic societies to adopt deterrence as the guiding principle of their national security policy. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries, as well as neutralist democracies such as Sweden and Switzerland, offer telling examples—as does Israel.[18]

The Premises of Israeli Strategy

The extent to which the Israeli experience fits into the foregoing concept of conventional deterrence hinges on two principal factors. First, it must be established that the Jewish state has persistently acted on the assumption of an unbridgeable gap in overall war-making potentials between itself and its Arab adversaries. Second, it must be established that Israelis, and has always been, a status quo power, whose overriding purpose is to preserve a given regional order.

That Israel has been acting (rightly or wrongly) on the assumption of an unbridgeable inferiority (in terms of power rather than culture or intellect) is

virtually a banality. The state's founder and first prime minister, David Ben Gurion, articulated the essence of this permanent Israeli theme shortly after the establishment of the state. Addressing the Knesset—Israel's unicameral legislature—he reminded the 120 members that the Jewish state was

in fact a small island surrounded by a great Arab ocean extending over two continents—in Asia and in North Africa, from the Taurus Mountains in south Turkey to the Atlas Mountains on the Atlantic coast. This ocean is spread over a contiguous area of 4 million square miles, an area larger than that of the United States, in which 70 million people . . . most of them Arab-speaking Moslems, live. Only four of these countries have a common border with Israel—Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. These cover an area of 460,000 square miles and have a population of 29 million people, approximately fifty-eight times the size of Israel.

Hence, he said on another occasion, "Israel has to observe with cruel clarity the fatal difference" between itself and its "adversaries" . . .[the latter] think that they are capable of solving the problem of Israel once and for all by total destruction . . . [Israel, for its part] cannot and does not wish to achieve security through a military victory . . . [Israel] is incapable of eliminating millions of Arabs in the Middle East."[19]

The same fundamental assumption has also been just as much of a centerpiece in the thinking of Ben Gurion's successors and disciples. Note, for instance, the following passage from Yigal Allon's survey of Israel's strategic thinking:

From a demographic point of view, Israel's two and a half million Jews [in the 1950s] had to contend with more than a hundred million Arabs from the Atlantic to the Persian Gulf. Geostrategically speaking, Israel was a narrow strip of land, had its back to the sea, and was surrounded; the lands of the enemy, by contrast, formed a sub-continent. Israel was a country desperately poor in natural resources pitting itself against countries possessing almost inexhaustible natural wealth: oil, big rivers, vast areas of arable land, about half of the world's hydrocarbon reserves. Both in its own region and in the larger world Israel was uniquely isolated. Apart from its bonds with world Jewry, it had no ethnic or religious links with any other nation.[20]

Statements such as this were made in the context of the 1950s, Israel's first decade of statehood, when the perception of isolation and vulnerability was most acute. Later, however, in the Jewish state in the wake of the 1967 victory over the armies of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, this theme of insurmountable inferiority lost much of its salience. But the 1973 Yom Kippur War revived the somber mood. Even retired Major-General Moshe Dayan, the hero of Israel's victories in the 1956 Sinai campaign and the 1967 Six-Day War and a person who would normally underemphasize Israel's weakness, hastened in the course of the Yom Kippur War to stress Israel's intrinsic inability to sustain the rigors of a protracted

war. "If we do not achieve a decision" in the battlefields of Sinai and the Golan, Dayan told his cabinet colleagues as well as the IDF General Staff,

our strength will be whittled away and we shall be left without sufficient military force in the middle of the campaign. The Arabs possess great staying power. There are 70–80 million Arabs and we are fewer than three million. In their armies there are about one million soldiers; the USSR supplies them with all the arms they need. They dispose of vast financial resources. Aside from the Arab states currently fighting, the others, too—Iraq, Saudi Arabia, etc—are ready to join. We have turned to the United States and urgently requested additional arms. But, in any case, no one will fight for us.[21]

The first Likud government (1977–81) seems to have also acted on the assumption of an innate military inferiority. The Arabs, speculated retired Major-General Ezer Weizman—commanding officer of the Israeli Air Force until shortly before the 1967 war, nephew of Israel's first president, and the minister of defense in Menachem Begin's first cabinet—view Israel's victories "as a passing episode, a temporary imperative of history. . . . We, the Israelis," Weizman continued,

embraced the notion that the Arabs are mystics and that our power stems from our rationality. But an objective examination of the circumstances and of the numerical aspects turns us into mystics and the Arabs into realists and rationalists. We argue that three million Jews can hold their own against one hundred million Arabs. They argue that in the long run their overwhelming quantity and fantastic wealth will give them an edge. In order to win, say the Arabs, they don't have to be as efficient on the battlefields as we are. It is enough for them to be far less efficient [since] quantity will ultimately turn into quality. The Jews have already flexed their muscles to the limit. . . . Soviet weapons, European and some U.S. support have built Arab power; frequent wars and an Arab belief that ultimately the wheel of fortune will turn in their favor even if they have to go through fourth, fifth, sixth, endless new wars constitute a powerful motivation.[22]

During Menachem Begin's second Likud administration (1981–84), Israel's national security policy under the influence of retired Major-General Ariel ("Arik") Sharon initially reverted to something resembling the confidence and assumption of regional preponderance of the immediate aftermath of the Six-Day War. Sharon's successors, however, returned to the old state of mind, assuming as a matter of course that Israel is inherently the weaker party in the Arab–Israeli conflict. "In the 1967 Six-Day War," said Moshe Arens, a leading "hawk" who succeeded Sharon as minister of defense in February 1983,

we thought that we obtained peace, or at least that we created the basis for peace. Despite our tremendous desire to concentrate all our efforts, to make

a superordinate endeavor, come what may, and terminate the problem once and for all, make peace, disarm, reduce the defense budget, we do not have the ability to do so. The objective situation is such that it is not in our capacity to achieve what the Allies achieved in World War II: subdue the Germans. . . . The balance of forces in the area is different. We can defend ourselves. We can cause the Arabs pain. We can destroy their armies for a while. But solving the problem once and for all is beyond our capacity.[23]

If this assortment of statements over a period of four decades demonstrates the basic continuity of the Israeli perception of an unbridgeable inferiority, it does not in itself support the hypothesis that the Jewish state has also been a status quo power. Indeed, establishing this proposition appears to be a far more demanding task, since even a cursory glance at Israel's map underlines the glaring gap between the United Nations' 1947 Partition boundaries and Israel's borders in the 1980s. But to deduce from Israel's variable political geography a fundamental and determined intent to reshuffle the status quo is to confuse afterthought with premeditation.

The initial blueprint, so to speak, of the Zionist movement that begot the state of Israel, the thoughts and dreams of its leaders, included a Jewish state in the territory of what in the 1980s is Israel proper within the 1949 armistice demarcation ("green") lines, as well as the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Gilad region in northern Jordan, the Howran in the Syrian Golan, and that part of southern Lebanon lying south of the Awali River. Moreover, both the Achdut Haavodah movement on the left of the Israeli political spectrum and Herut on the right have continued to espouse this cause with very minor changes to date.

Yet such grandiloquent dreams notwithstanding, the prestatehood Zionist record and the record of Israel as a state reflect a persistent inclination of the mainstream of political opinion to settle for far less than the boundaries of the biblical Promised Land. In 1937—following a near fratricidal debate—the Zionist movement accepted the notion of a truncated Jewish state in a marginal part of historic Palestine. In 1947 the leadership of the Yishuv—the prestatehood Jewish political community in Palestine—accepted the very limited and not entirely logical boundaries offered by the U.N. Partition Resolution. In 1949 Israel's government accepted the armistice demarcation lines (ADL) that resulted from negotiations with all its neighbors. Indeed, in the course of these negotiations, Israel demanded that the agreements have a political content and suggested that the provisional demarcation lines, corresponding as they did to the cease-fire lines at the end of the 1948 war, should be affixed by mutual agreement as the final borders of the Jewish state.

In 1956, furthermore, Ben Gurion initially expressed a desire to maintain Israel's hold over some parts of the Egyptian territory that had been captured in the Sinai campaign, but withdrew this claim a few days later. A decade later, on June 19, 1967, a week after the Six-Day War, the National Unity cabinet

of Prime Minister Levi Eshkol (which included both Begin's Herut and the Achdut Haavodah) endorsed the principle that the recently occupied territories of the Golan and the Sinai be returned to their Arab owners if and when peace agreements were signed with them. The decision was ambiguous about the future of the West Bank, but it left the door ajar for negotiations concerning this part of historic Palestine as well. Contrary to the claims of most apologists for the Arab cause, then, the 1967 war was not launched for the purpose of acquiring territories but, rather, in response to a challenge that was perceived by the Israelis themselves in strategic and even existential terms.[24]

Nevertheless, the fact that the 1967 war was followed not by negotiations but instead by further wars, because the Arabs presented as a precondition to negotiations the return of their lost territories, gradually caused a hardening of Israeli attitudes. The long-suppressed territorial dreams of some elements of Israeli society returned to the fore and ultimately were officially legitimized as concrete political objectives under the Likud governments of Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir (1977–84). The latter, to be sure, returned the Sinai peninsula—three times the size of Israel and the West Bank combined—to Egyptian hands within the framework of the Camp David Peace Accords of September 1978. However, they also extended Israeli law to the Golan and vowed not to allow any "foreign" rule over the West Bank ("Judea and Samaria" in official Israeli utterances ever since the Likud's advent to power).[25]

Israel, then, would never launch a war for the purpose of changing the status quo, although important elements on the Israeli domestic scene would not agree to the return of some territories occupied in the course of one war or another. Seen in these terms, the Jewish state clearly qualifies as being inherently a status quo power. This fundamental disposition runs deeper, however. In its simplest form, it is directly related to the deep-seated Israeli suspicion that the Arabs want nothing less than the liquidation of the Jewish state. Assuming this, most Israeli Jews (17 percent of the citizens of Israel within the 1967 armistice lines are Arabs) have always been united in viewing the state's ultimate purpose as the preservation of its existence. The status quo, then, means a regional order in which a sovereign Jewish state continues to exist side by side with all existing Arab states. The precise location of specific boundaries is a secondary issue that can be settled in direct negotiations. What matters, in this Israeli perception, is, first, that Israel's existence be accepted by its neighbors, and, second, that no new entities—for example, a Palestinian state on the West Bank or a Greater Syria consisting of present-day Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan—be superimposed on the existing regional structure.[26]

The overriding strategic problem facing Israeli policymakers from the outset was how to preserve this status quo under conditions of abject inferiority. Ben Gurion, again, set the tone in this regard for decades to come. Asked in April 1949, during the Knesset debate on the Security Service Act, why the armed forces of the Jewish state should be called the Israel Defense Forces when its

The person who asked the question does not distinguish between a title which refers to foreign policy [on the one hand] and methods of warfare [on the other hand]. The title Israel Defense Force [emphasis added] is intended to indicate that the State of Israel has no offensive intentions against its neighbors and that it is peace loving. But if we are attacked, we will defend ourselves in the most efficient way, which is a blasting and dramatic offensive [carried out] to the extent possible on enemy territory and vital centers in order to thwart its offensive and [minimize] its ability to harm. Therefore, we shall maintain the peace-conoting title [Israel Defense Force] and the war-winning strategy.[27]

A decade later, Yigal Allon's analysis of the same fundamental problem would lead him to very similar conclusions. "No modern country can surround itself with a wall," Allon wrote—certainly not a country with such a small population, facing such overwhelmingly superior forces, and locked within "unmanageably long" boundaries. A defensive posture, then, is not feasible. It follows that

if the enemy did not intend war, it was his business not to make movements which would justify a preemptive counterattack. If [on the other hand] he did intend war he could not justifiably protest if his intentions are thwarted. It could be argued, moreover, that the recognition of the right of preemptive counterattack [would] increase the persuasive power of the defender's deterrent and thereby diminish the possibility of a hostile action. For the mere possession of armaments . . . could not necessarily deter the enemy. It is the knowledge that the defender was ready to use them, promptly and effectively—namely his credibility—that might prevent their having to be used at all.[28]

Such statements by Israeli decision makers reflect their intuitive understanding, distilled by rich practical experience, of the nature of conventional deterrence. Moreover, fully alive to the relative precariousness of the Israeli deterrent, on the one hand, and assuming intuitively that conventional deterrence is a sequential, aggregative, and long-term value, on the other hand, Israeli policymakers have tended to emphasize the cumulative nature of their own version of deterrence. "Israel's conflict with the Arabs," said a former commanding officer of the IDF's Officers Training Academy, "can be compared to a match between a heavyweight and a lightweight boxer. The former has a good chance, though not a certainty, of winning by a knockout. His lightweight opponent knows that he has no such capability. He can only hope to win the match if he attempts to deny a knockout to his superior rival and strives ultimately to win by points."[29]

Explicating the Israeli doctrine that this metaphor suggests is exceedingly difficult because, unlike most pluralistic democracies, the Jewish state has never had a comprehensive, integrated, and fully coherent doctrine in the form of either a defense white paper or a comprehensive annual statement by the minister of defense to the Knesset.[30] Nevertheless, a rich assortment of

reports, memoirs, interviews, and analytical writings by Israeli practitioners has already become available to the general public. From such sources it is quite possible to reconstruct a reasonably accurate profile of this doctrine.

It starts from a hidden assumption that Arab intentions are not static but are a product of opportunity. They change according to the vicissitudes of inter-Arab politics; the global context in which they take place; the dynamics of the regional (not only Arab–Israeli but also Arab–Arab and, for instance, Arab–Iranian) arms race; and, above all, the perceived likelihood of either pain or gain. If Israeli policy in all its aspects succeeds in impressing on the Arabs the diminishing likelihood of realistic opportunities to defeat the Jewish state, then the Arabs will ultimately resign themselves to Israel's existence.

Ostensibly the Arab world is so overwhelmingly superior that Israel does not stand a chance. In reality, however, the Arabs are so divided that, given a judicious manipulation by Israel, their theoretical potential will never be successfully converted into a corresponding power of decision on the battlefield. Indeed, pan-Arabism, the ideology of Arab unity that, if half successful, could confront Israel with a formidable threat, has increasingly revealed itself to be an empty word, a charade, a delusion—a cover-up for intense competition, rivalry, and mistrust among the Arabs themselves. Arab nation-states are emerging, and these develop their own *raison d'état*. Inevitably this brings them into conflicts of interest with one another and increasingly creates tacit strands of limited but real convergence of interest between some of them and their Jewish adversary.

Against such a background, Israel's survival is perceived as a realistic proposition if only the Israelis play it right. They should assume that years, decades, perhaps even centuries will have to pass before "real" peace (as among the Benelux countries, between Canada and the United States, or among the Scandinavians) will become the rule. Meanwhile Israel should do anything it can to limit the damage. Divisions in the Arab world ought to be encouraged, induced, and exploited. Allies in the Middle East and beyond who have their own disputes with Israel's principal adversaries should be cultivated. The Arabs should be denied opportunities for surprise attacks, wars of attrition, guerrilla warfare, terrorism, economic boycotts, psychological pressures, and hostile propaganda.

To succeed in this struggle Israel may have to resort occasionally to preventive wars, preemptive strikes, retaliations of various types and scales. The overriding purpose should be to project maximum power through a minimal resort to force; the governing principle should be to accumulate strength, militarily, economically, and psychologically; to use force sparingly, but with devastating effect. The ultimate objective of the use of force should be not only to achieve military results but also, above all, to erode Arab self-confidence. Gradually, with the passage of time, the Arabs—according to this thesis—would simply despair of their intention to undo the Jewish state. A string of brief but decisive

encounters will simply wear down the Arab determination to persist with the conflict. Their campaign will lose momentum. Their coalition will disintegrate, and their war against Israel will eventually grind to a halt—not out of any love for their Jewish neighbors, but from sheer loss of appetite for costly and unsuccessful wars. As Yigal Allon once put it, "In the long term deterrence leads to resignation and resignation—to peace."[31]

Restated as a theory of deterrence, this thesis essentially posits that the combination of adroit political maneuvering and an unknown but manageable number of Israeli battlefield victories over an unspecified but reasonable period of time will gradually modify the Arab strategic calculus. From the expectation of a swift, cheap, and decisive victory (such as the Arabs entertained on the eve of the 1948 and 1967 wars); the Arabs will gradually move to tacit acceptance of the permanence of the Jewish state in their midst. Tacit acceptance will be following by normalization of relations (that is, free movement of people, commodities, and ideas across boundaries), which will ultimately lead to peace. The empirical validity of this thesis remains to be proved even after close to four decades of Israeli independence. There is no doubt, however, that it is predicated on a rather compelling logic.[32]

Theses and Organization of the Book

Israeli policymakers, then, have acted on explicable and shared common premises and, for the most part, have been informed by a good intuitive understanding of the essence of conventional deterrence. This general proposition, however, should not be confused either with unanimity or with efficacy. In fact, Israeli strategy has often been inconsistent, erratic, even illogical. Deterrence has been more persistently advocated than systematically applied. Though elevated to the status of a virtual creed, it has frequently been misapplied, with costly repercussions for all concerned—above all for the Israelis themselves. Nonetheless, in many respects Israel's deterrence strategy has added up to a spectacular success story, even if the same success could often have been achieved at a lower price or, alternatively, if a greater success could have been obtained for a similar investment in blood, money, and human energy.

This, in a nutshell, is the overall thesis that emerges from an evaluation of four strategic "packages" evolved by successive Israeli governments in the course of the periods 1949–56, 1957–67, 1967–73, and 1974–84, respectively.[33] Each such package offered its own solutions to five key policy problems:

1. What military capabilities should be constructed, and how should they be organized in relation to space?

2. Could alliances strengthen Israel's deterrence and, if so, with what powers and under what terms?

3. What are Israel's essential security margins, and to what extent this should be reflected in the enunciation of casi belli and specified "red lines"?

4. Should Israel's force employment doctrines deliberately emphasize preemption, retaliation, and escalation (both vertically—in weapon systems—and horizontally—in space), and to what extent should they be publicly enunciated in advance?

5. How should the preferred strategic package be related to constraints imposed by domestic politics, and what should be done to ensure that the domestic political process strengthens the nation's deterrent?

Although in principle all Israeli governments to date have addressed themselves to more or less the same agenda, each government has evolved its own peculiar mix of strategic preferences. The emphasis in the first package, during the 1949–56 period, was primarily defensive—namely, on deterrence by denial. The second package, which evolved between the Sinai campaign and the Six-Day War, shifted the emphasis markedly to deterrence by punishment. The third package, adopted between the 1967 and the 1973 wars, sought unsuccessfully to adapt the previous package to the geostrategic configuration that resulted from the victory of 1967. Finally, the fourth package, which is still in force at the time of writing, reverted again to deterrence by punishment, though attenuated by the bitter experience in Lebanon and by the spectacular rise of Syria's power.

The most important stimulus for change in each of these strategic packages was the occurrence of a major war. This is reflected, for example, in the seesaw movement from denial to punishment, back to denial, and then halfway back to punishment again. Revisions, however, were never carried out as systematically as might be suggested by this analytically convenient packaging of prevailing concepts. An almost equally important source of transition from one package to another was the fragmented, unstructured, incremental, occasionally almost chaotic nature of the decision-making process. There were, however, important differences in this respect between governments. As long as David Ben Gurion was still at the helm, Israeli strategy evolved within the parameters of his own comprehensive and more or less coherent strategic-political concept. To be sure, even under this grand old man, cardinal decisions were often made incrementally. But the breadth of his strategic-political vision, his overbearing stature, his subordinates' utter personal loyalty to him, his firm insulation of the defense establishment from any competing political advocates (for which he would be subsequently accused of "politicization" of the military)[34]—all these ensured an overall consistency in action and, in particular, a prudent balance between political ends and strategic-military means.

Under Ben Gurion's successors, some of them his own devout disciples, the defense establishment became more democratic (that is, more permeable to a variety of contending advocacies), but this was achieved at the cost of the

disruption of internal balance and conceptual cohesion. A foretaste of things to come could be observed during 1954, when Ben Gurion retired to a kibbutz in the Negev Desert and his powers were divided incoherently between Moshe Sharett (as prime minister and minister of foreign affairs); Pinchas Lavon (as minister of defense); and, in effect, Moshe Dayan (as chief of staff of the IDF). The damage done during this brief interlude, though substantial, was at last controlled by Ben Gurion himself upon his return to power in February 1955.

Not so, however, after Ben Gurion's final retirement from politics in 1963. Levi Eshkol, Golda Meir, Moshe Dayan, Yitzhak Rabin, Menachem Begin, Ezer Weizman, Moshe Arens, Ariel Sharon, and Shimon Peres could each for the most part draw on an exceedingly rich practical experience, including for some of them a long and distinguished career in the armed forces or in the civilian management of national security. Although some of them tended to articulate their opinions in the grandiloquent style of Ben Gurion, most of them proved far less capable than Ben Gurion of striking an optimal balance among the five main items on the nation's deterrence agenda.

Levi Eshkol, on the one hand, and Menachem Begin and Ariel Sharon, on the other, failed to manage the domestic political dimension. Whereas the former inspired loss of confidence in his government, the latter two had such a divisive impact that at moments they seemed to be driving the Israeli polity to the verge of civil war. Golda Meir was not a great success in this sense, either; but her worst mistake was the failure to notice in time an ever-widening gap between the government's overall political disposition and the IDF's operational doctrines.

By contrast, Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres, as prime minister and minister of defense, respectively, cannot be blamed for any dramatic calamity. But they can be faulted for having permitted the IDF to grow quantitatively above and beyond what the Israeli economy could conceivably bear. This was partly due to sheer panic in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War. But it may also have reflected a certain failure of perception of the optimal manner in which the IDF should be organized, deployed, and employed.

Moreover, the decline in Israeli strategic thinking was paradoxically accelerated, perhaps even created, by the rise in influence over policymaking of professional soldiers and national security bureaucrats. Under Ben Gurion the influence of so-called micro military thinking over macro, grand strategic policies was relatively limited. Ben Gurion's immediate successor, Levi Eshkol, however, was far less capable of acting as a political devil's advocate against technical and essentially tactical military advice. The result was that professional, technical, micro military definitions of situations and choices of responses had a disproportionate influence over the policies of his government.

Golda Meir, Eshkol's successor as prime minister, fell into the same trap. Her own minister of defense, Moshe Dayan, was, to be sure, a far more sophisticated political-strategic thinker than were Eshkol's aides. Contrary to

his image as an unruly and brusque warrior, however, Dayan proved strangely passive, almost fatalistic, whenever his better strategic-political judgment was incompatible with the views of the domineering, but unimaginative, Mrs. Meir. Consequently, Meir's views, which were greatly influenced by the advocacies of such military technocrats as Generals Bar-Lev and Elazar, ultimately prevailed.

With Rabin's advent to the prime ministership, this process, whereby able military and civilian experts were promoted to their level of declining competence, reached its peak. For the next three years (1974–77), Israel's national security was entrusted to a leading ministerial team whose apprenticeship had been overwhelmingly within the military and civilian bureaucracies. Yesterday's outstanding technocrats of national security thus became today's somewhat less impressive policymakers.

Menachem Begin seemed, during his first two years in office, to have pushed the pendulum back to the Ben Gurion model. Here at last, or so it seemed, was a prime minister with a broader vision, who would be able to strike a more promising balance between the political-strategic macro and the military-tactical micro approaches. Such hopes, however, were dashed even before the end of Begin's first term. In his fourth year in office, national security was virtually the monopoly of the chief of staff, Rafael Eitan, one of the bravest, yet also one of the most simpleminded soldiers in Israel's history. Then, in 1982, Eitan was subordinated to Sharon, a person whose pretense as a grand strategist had proved far in excess of his actual competence in this sphere.

Sharon's ouster in disgrace from the Ministry of Defense in February 1983 brought about the nomination of Arens, the very epitome of the national security technocrat. After the elections of 1984, Arens was replaced by Yitzhak Rabin, this time as minister of defense in a government headed by Shimon Peres. The continuity of this pattern, whereby military and managerial experts were placed at the apex of national security decision making, was thus maintained.

In retrospect it appears that the cumulative consequences of this decline in strategic vision, political wisdom, and leadership since the departure of Ben Gurion were dismal. Deterrence became identified exclusively with the denial to the adversary of any territorial gains and with a tactical war-winning capability (koach hakhra'a in Hebrew). The subtler *political* dimensions of deterrence—and, in particular, the impact of Israeli action on Arab motivation and the role which power multipliers such as alliances, casi belli, and domestic consensus play in the cultivation and maintenance of deterrence was—increasingly overlooked. The problem at hand was perceived as primarily one of keeping abreast of the arms race with the Arabs and holding on with dogged determination to the bulk of the territory that the IDF had captured in the 1967 war.

What added impetus to this process, above and beyond the decline in the intellectual quality of strategic-political leadership, was the ever-deepening domestic schism. The Israeli national security machinery, at all its levels, is a

microcosmic reflection of Israeli society. When the latter enjoyed a high degree of consensus, the performance of the IDF reflected that consensus accurately. But when Israel became increasingly divided by a schism between territorial maximalists and minimalists, between messianic dreamers who overlooked the needs of the present and cynical pragmatists who neglected the longer-term implications of their actions altogether, between supporters of the war in Lebanon and opponents of this war, the IDF could not be insulated. The result was an incipient and diffuse, yet nevertheless significant, perversion of strategic-political thinking by ideological, bureaucratic, and even sheer personal preferences.

The growing poverty of Israeli strategy led some observers to the conclusion that Israel's conventional deterrence had become a chimera. "Can one really talk about Israeli deterrence?" One prominent Israeli scholar asked shortly after the Yom Kippur War.

After all, the term [deterrence] is borrowed from the world of nuclear powers, which have the capacity for mutual destruction, which, owing to the glaring asymmetry between Israel and the Arabs, does not pertain to the Arab–Israeli conflict. Moreover, one should not overlook the fact that Israel's deterrence has never survived longer than was required for the Arabs to build capabilities which would be adequate to overcome their fears born out of their latest defeat. In this sense, Arab defeats proved to be more of a stimulus for further wars. Thus [it may be argued] under the psychological conditions generated by the asymmetry in resources in which the Arabs have such a clear edge (above all in their own eyes), it seems that conceptualizing Israeli strategy in terms of conventional deterrence is more misleading than helpful.[35]

It did not take very long for such views to be extended to their seemingly logical conclusion: Israel has no alternative but to disclose a nuclear option and, in fact, to turn nuclear devices from weapons of last resort to an integral part of the "normal" order of battle. Moshe Dayan muttered something to this effect in the immediate aftermath of the Yom Kippur War, when he and most Israelis were still recovering from the shockwaves of this "earthquake."[36] Nor was it long before Dayan's cryptic comments were echoed in academe.[37] By 1982 the thesis that Israel should "go public with the bomb" had given rise to a well-documented and elegantly argued book-length study. Unperturbed by the fact that throughout the West a massive movement for a nuclear freeze was fast gaining respectability, this study advocated openly and unreservedly that Israel should introduce an explicit nuclear strategy to buttress its presumably failing conventional deterrence.[38]

Whether or not Israel's disclosure of a nuclear strategy has already become pertinent depends, in the final analysis, on an evaluation of its conventional deterrence. If a detailed reappraisal, such as in the present study, were to lead to the conclusion that Israel's conventional deterrence has already outlived its usefulness, the inescapable implication would be that a nuclear deterrent has

become the only alternative. But this is not the main finding of this study. Although the discussion that follows is critical of many aspects of Israel's strategic conduct, it also leads to an unequivocal rejection of the notion that the Jewish state should introduce nuclear weapons into its regular strategic arsenal. Israel's conventional deterrence has not always been optimal, and often it was substantially weakened by ill-advised Israeli policies. It still remains viable, however, and it can be reinforced further by steps that are within Israel's capacity.

These theses emerge from a discussion of the four observed strategic packages. Chapter 2 of this book focuses on the 1949–56 period, the formative years in which the ground rules of Israeli strategic-military doctrine took shape. Chapter 3 pursues the topic further against the background of the 1957–67 decade, the era in which Israel's concept of conventional deterrence was first consciously articulated. Chapter 4 traces the conceptual, strategic, and political dynamics that caused the pendulum to swing back to an essentially defensive/denial posture during the 1967–73 period. Chapter 5 discusses the partial shift back to something resembling deterrence by punishment. Finally, chapter 6 reassembles the various strands of the analysis and addresses the question of whether or not an Israeli nuclear strategy is inevitable in the foreseeable future.

Even though some of the titles may suggest otherwise, the agenda remains the same throughout the discussion: every part begins—as figure 1–1 illustrates—with the topic of capabilities and force structure and then moves on to the topics of alliances, threats, force-employment dispositions, and the relevant domestic political backdrop. Hence, whereas in its ensemble the study tells the history of Israeli strategy, separately its component parts constitute comparable case studies. This methodology facilitates a modest attempt in chapter 7, the final chapter of the book, to draw from the examination of the Israeli experience some broader theoretical thoughts about the nature of conventional deterrence.

Issue Area \ Period Strategic Package	1949 – 1956	1957 – 1967	1967 – 1973	1974 – 1984
Capabilities and Force Structure				
Alliances				
Threats				
Force Employment Predispositions				
The Domestic Political Backdrop				
Outcome: The Prevailing Strategic Package				

Figure 1–1. The Organization of the Study