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**Israeli Perceptions of the
Iranian Issue**

Eugene Kogan

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Key Points

* There is a clear agreement within the Israeli military ranks and the political leadership that the Iranian nuclear programme poses a threat to the whole world and not just to Israel. As a result, diplomacy has to be given ample time before resorting to various sanctions including military options.

* Nonetheless, as diplomacy leads nowhere, various sanctions including the military option are gradually moving to the central stage. There is also a deep understanding within the Israeli defence establishment that should there be a pre-emptive strike against Iran, it will respond with all its military might, including using proxy forces such as Hizbullah, which is based in Lebanon. As a result, Israel has been taking measures to protect itself in case of an attack from Iran.

* As for an Israeli military strike, there are too many question marks regarding a successful outcome. However, such a possibility cannot be dismissed outright. Reaction from the West or Russia will not be positive, but neither will Israel be ostracised.

Contents

Introduction	1
Iranian nuclear programme – A world problem and not just Israel's	3
In case of a pre-emptive strike against Iran	5
Potential operation: Facts and practicalities	6
In case of an attack from Iran	8
International Reaction	9
Conclusion	10

We have fully
fooled everybody
about our nuclear
intentions



We insist on our
right to a full
nuclear fuel
cycle!



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Introduction

This report deals with the issue of Israeli reporting and perception of the Iranian nuclear programme under prime ministers Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert, who are rather different in style and policy. Although they belong to different generations of Israeli politicians, Olmert fully understands, as did Sharon, the threat that emanates from Iran towards Israel. Sharon also stressed, and Olmert continues to stress, that Iran has been and still is a world problem and not just that of Israel.

In a sharply addressed article, Aluf Benn, *Haaretz* defence correspondent, pointed to a substantial change of attitude and a quiet change in Israeli policy that have occurred toward the nuclear threat from Iran since the installation of a new Israeli government under of Ehud Olmert. When Ariel Sharon was prime minister, he dictated a “low profile”. Israel was interested in enlisting the West’s support against Iran, he ruled, so it should speak in public as little as possible, while doing as much as possible via quiet diplomatic channels and psychological warfare. Sharon went only as far as to state that Israel would never accept a nuclear Iran. Without Ariel Sharon at the helm the new Israeli leaders are finding it difficult to inspire the same degree of fearful respect. The result undermines the previous policy.¹ However, it appears that Ehud Olmert’s Kadima-led coalition government has finally grasped Ariel Sharon’s policy. As a result, the government will continue to push for more aggressive US-led efforts to rein in Tehran, while keeping inflammatory rhetoric and public acknowledgement of military planning to a bare minimum.²

In the time of Ariel Sharon’s leadership, Ephraim Kam, researcher with the Tel Aviv University-based Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, noted in a 2002 article “Israel’s Assessment of the Iranian Threat” that most worrisome for Israel are Iran’s missile and nuclear programmes. Iran is working on a nuclear programme that might produce a weapon within a decade. Iranian nuclear capability would fundamentally alter the balance of forces in the Middle East and pose a new type of strategic threat to Israel.³ Even though Kam has not stated in clear terms what kind of new strategic threat that will be, it can be suggested that a potential nuclear confrontation between Iran and Israel can no longer be taken out of any equation.

Furthermore, Kam continued, “If Iran manages to acquire a nuclear weapon it will represent a grave threat, not only to Israel, but also to many Arab states and to American interests in the Middle East. If Iran breaks through the firewall, it would immediately produce tremendous tension and uncertainty and increase instability.”⁴ Although it is not intended to deal here with the issue of consequences of the Iranian threat to the region, it is nonetheless important to keep them in mind. The so-called Greater Middle East is prone to violence, which cannot always be kept under control. In spite of Kam’s very cautious analysis, using more than once the word “If”, he nevertheless states the situation in clear terms. The

importance of such a threat, as will be presented and discussed in this report, can no longer be ignored.

Defense News in its January's 2004 issue cited Brigadier General (retired) Ephraim Sneh, chairman of the Israeli Knesset subcommittee on defence planning and policy, who said that "I believe that in 2004 Iran will definitely reach the point of no return; that is, it would no longer need outside assistance to build a nuclear bomb".⁵ Undoubtedly, the point of no return underlines the peak stage in development of the Iranian nuclear capability. Israel has since said that if the Iranians' drive to the bomb is not stopped, they would master the nuclear fuel cycle by the end of 2006 – the point which Israel considers to be the "point of no return".⁶ However, according to a *Haaretz* report, Israeli officials are no longer discussing the "point of no return" of Iranian nuclear power, focusing instead on "crossing the technological threshold" of completing the research and development stage. Various experts in the West have estimated that Iran will need six months to a year to complete this phase.⁷ In *The Jerusalem Post* interview with the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Dan Halutz, Halutz said that there are two distinctive "points of no return" – having the information and having technical ability. Once the Iranians crossed the technical line (also called the technological threshold) it means that they have the technical ability. However, at the same time, they can still decide to step back from that line – which does not mean they lose the information but does mean that they surrender the ability. In terms of technical ability the Iranians are close, but are not yet there.⁸ An Israeli intelligence official noted that "once the Iranians cross the technical line, sanctions become less meaningful and the military option becomes exponentially more difficult to employ".⁹

If and when assertions of various experts related to the technical point of no return are correct, then any military operation has to be launched shortly before the Iranians cross the technical line, namely before the end of December 2006-mid-April 2007. Sneh further added that "the Iranians have learned how to conceal their nuclear programme, and therefore [Israelis] do not believe that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections would lead anywhere". As a result, Sneh continued, "a nuclear weapon in the hands of a fanatic regime like the one in Iran at the moment is, for us, something inconceivable".¹⁰ The question that Sneh neither posed nor answered was what would Israel do against such a fanatic regime? This report will try to answer this question.

It is important to stress from the outset that there is a clear understanding among various Israeli officials that destroying Iranian atomic sites would not be easily accomplished. The Iranian officials from the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran learned a useful lesson from the Israeli attack on the Iraq-based Osiraq main nuclear facility back in 1981 and, as a result, have dispersed their atomic sites all over the country, as well as placing them in a variety of densely populated areas. Therefore, the so-called collateral damage could be very significant if these sites are bombarded. The European Union (EU) member states led by France, Germany and the UK are likely to express their displeasure and a strong verbal disapproval in case of an Israeli air operation. In addition, General Ahmad Vahid, the father of Iran's missile industry, said that "Our nuclear capabilities are not annihilable". "We have mastered nuclear science by ourselves. In case of any damage, we could construct the nuclear capabilities somewhere else."¹¹ Such a possibility cannot be dismissed outright and should be carefully assessed.¹²

Iranian nuclear programme – a world problem and not just Israel's

Major General Amos Gilad, countering a warning by Vice Premier Shimon Peres that “Iran, too, can be destroyed,” said that “Israel should not use a language of threats in dealing with Tehran”. He continued, “Israel should not place itself in the front-lines of the Iran issue” and yet “it does need to spearhead treatment on the Iran matter because this is a world problem. We suggest not adopting a language of threats. It is tremendously important for the world to isolate Iran.” He also added that “international co-operation and legitimacy is important for Israel. Even if we later demand other options (an implicit reference to a military option) it is important for us to pass the necessary course of legitimacy and international support.”¹³ Vice Premier Peres was the first to state in clear terms that “We do not look upon it as an Iranian-Israeli conflict exclusively... [Iran] is basically a danger to the world, not just Israel”.¹⁴ It can be suggested that although President of Iran Mahmoud Ahmadinejad wishes to present it as exclusively an Iranian-Israeli conflict, the Israeli politicians have not taken his bait.

According to Ari Shavit's script, the West cannot accept Iran's nuclear project. Therefore, confrontation is inevitable. In the best scenario, it will end the way that the Cuban missile crisis did; in the worst case scenario, it will turn ugly and irradiate the Middle East. The timetable is also more or less known. At the diplomatic level, the crisis may peak as early as autumn 2006. From a military standpoint, the crisis may reach its zenith in the winter, after the US congressional elections. Either way, 2007 will be a critical year. It poses a challenge to the West of a kind that it has not faced since the Cold War. For Israel, it is a date with destiny.¹⁵

Privately, more and more experts in Israel and world-wide express serious concern. When the international community is faced with the Iranian nuclear threat, it has four main alternatives: acquiescence, diplomatic action, US military action, or a situation in which Israel is forced to act. An Israeli operation is at the bottom of the list: its ramifications are liable to be severe. But even a US military operation, under UN auspices or not, would cause a regional earthquake, damage the economies of the West and result in an attack against Israel. Acquiescing in an Iranian bomb is out of the question, and a diplomatic solution is not likely. As such, there is no good solution on the horizon. The likely choice is between the bad and the terrible.¹⁶

Another option could include targeting the scientists, rather than the sites. Efraim Inbar, director of the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies at Bar-Ilan University, suggested reaching out to the Iranian nuclear experts. “These scientists should be given serious assistance to find refuge or to continue their professional career in the West... If such an option failed, they could be viewed as threats to world-wide security. If the scientists decide to continue to serve their state, they must suffer the consequences.”¹⁷ This option is no longer viable, since the current regime has determined that such an option will not occur under any circumstances. This author is not convinced that such an option was considered and discussed in detail.

One defence official told *The Jerusalem Post* that “the whole Iranian issue concerns us and we are keeping close tabs on any new development on that front”. While Israeli officials were concerned at President Ahmadinejad's claim that Iran had successfully enriched uranium for the first time, Military Intelligence (MI) was not overly surprised. According to the intelligence assessment, even though Iran announced that it had started the enrichment process, it did not yet have a

sufficient amount of uranium to build a nuclear bomb – a process that could take another few years.¹⁸

Israeli officials said that President Ahmadinejad's announcement that Iran had successfully enriched uranium underlined the growing gap between international diplomatic efforts to stop the Iranians and the technological progress Tehran has been making. The officials said that the announcement should be a wake-up call to the international community to come out very quickly with a UN Security Council resolution that imposes real economic and academic sanctions on the Iranians. IDF sources noted that Israel was also unhappy with the movement on the diplomatic front against Iran (it remains unclear what exactly Israel was unhappy with). While MI predicts that sanctions will begin by September, one member of the IDF General Staff told *The Jerusalem Post* that in April 2006 it was still possible to stop Iran through diplomatic action. "Diplomatic action can prevent Iran from getting nuclear power... We need to be patient and we should let the world-wide diplomatic process take its course."¹⁹ However, one important point was stressed by *Haaretz*. In Jerusalem government officials expressed satisfaction with the Israeli success in persuading the Bush administration, and also less-friendly governments, that there is not unlimited time for diplomatic efforts.²⁰ Thus, the clock is ticking for both sides, namely Iran and the West including Israel. It is, however, not yet clear whether the government of Iran has been taking the time element really seriously. If President Ahmadinejad thought that Hizbullah's military operation against Israel would divert the attention of the international community from the Iranian nuclear programme, then he has certainly miscalculated.²¹ The programme remains on the agenda of the international community. In addition, Iran's support of Hizbullah has reinforced the point that the Iranian issue should be dealt with decisively, and not delayed time and again.

According to Giora Eiland, National Security Advisor, sanctions, or the threat of them, would be effective only if applied within a "matter of months" and, as a result, Eiland urged the Security Council powers – which have been divided on how aggressively to confront Iran – to speak in "one voice".²² There is one important point that the Israeli press and various officials very often overlook, however, namely that sanctions can produce a substantial damage to the Iranian economy and be really effective only in the long run, in a time frame of about 20-25 years and not over the next 3-5 years. In addition, sanctions can only be effective if they are imposed and enforced under UN auspices. The case of the sanctions imposed on Libya and their effectiveness can be taken as a benchmark.

In a comprehensive report, most of which is top secret, a military-civilian committee has determined that Iran is capable of kindling the entire Middle East and constitutes an existential threat to Israel. The committee also found that if Iran acquires nuclear arms, other Muslim countries in the Middle East could follow suit. The committee recommends that Israel maintain its policy of "nuclear ambiguity".²³ However, one crucial point was underlined by Giora Eiland: "If Iran, at the end of the day, manages to achieve nuclear weapons against the will of the rest of the world...the conclusion that might be made by one billion Muslims over the world is that Ahmadinejad is right". As a result, Eiland adds, "from that moment on, every conflict, every crisis in the Middle East is going to take place under an Iranian nuclear umbrella".²⁴ This will undoubtedly increase a chance of military confrontation between Iran and Israel severalfold.

Eiland said that if Iran eventually does acquire nuclear weapons, it would be unlikely to share them with the Islamic militants it backs in the Middle East. Eiland bases his argument on the premise that although Iranians are "extreme and anti-Israeli... they are at the same time responsible"²⁵ and rational in what they are

doing. Vice Premier Shimon Peres does not, however, share Eiland's view and claims that if Tehran were to achieve nuclear capabilities, they would make their way to terrorist organisations and that a nuclear threat would "crop up in every international conflict".²⁶ Hizbullah's firing of the Iranian-built Zelzal-1 short-range ballistic missile (SRBM) into the Israeli city of Hadera substantiated Peres' claim.

Most importantly, Aluf Benn reported that there are questions being raised in professional circles as to whether the world has already reached the point where it will have to choose between a nuclear Iran or a military operation against it - and what Israel would do about it.²⁷ It appears that although the world has not yet reached that point, it is certainly very close. As for the Israeli decision, according to Dan Halutz Iran would pose an existential threat to Israel only if it had a nuclear bomb and the means to launch it. He estimated that Iran would not have the bomb and launch capability before 2009 or 2010. On the other hand, the USA believes Iran will reach nuclear launch capability between 2012 and 2015.²⁸

In May 2006 Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told a joint meeting of the United States Senate and Congress that Iran poses a threat to Israel's existence and urged immediate international action to curb its nuclear programme. "For us this is an existential threat. A threat to which we cannot consent. But it is not Israel's threat alone. It is a threat to all those committed to stability in the Middle East and the well-being of the world at large. If we do not take Iran's bellicose rhetoric seriously now, we will be forced to take its nuclear aggression seriously later."²⁹ In early May 2006 US President George Bush had taken a similar line: "the world should take seriously the threat by Iranian President Mahmood Ahmadinejad of destroying Israel... We are talking about a specific threat on a partner of the US and Germany".³⁰ There at least two potential scenarios that need to be considered at this point: a pre-emptive strike against Iran and/or an attack from Iran as a result of an air operation against it.

In case of a pre-emptive strike against Iran

As far back as December 2004 Ephraim Kam wrote that a military option may also be considered in Israel, and remarks in this vein are more explicit in Israel than in the US. Prominent figures in the Israeli government and in the defence establishment have announced in recent months that they are waiting to see the results of the international pressure applied to Iran, but that if these prove insufficient Israel will have to rely on itself and take its own steps in its defence.³¹ Such a notion has recently been reinforced by *Haaretz*. Like the US, Israel has not ruled out a military strike as a last resort against Iran. Israel, however, is not widely believed to be capable of tackling Iran's formidable facilities alone.³² Perhaps because of Israel's limitations, Vice Premier Shimon Peres has implied that military action should be led by the United States, pointing to the recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Israeli officials have indicated that Israel would join any international operation against Iran.³³

On the other hand, IDF Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Dan Halutz, referring to reports claiming that a nuclear strike against Iran was in the making, carefully responded: "I suggest not to go too far with respect to a nuclear strike, not to seek Israeli answers and to refrain from offering them as well. I am not at all certain that if we examine Iran's targets, Israel would occupy the number one slot."³⁴

Brigadier General Yossi Kuperwasser, Head of the MI Research Division, warned that a country that plans to act against Iran should have the capability to minimise

the damage of the expected Iranian retaliation. He added that “a country which does not possess long-range operational capabilities should not threaten or boast about its capabilities. If it plans to operate over long ranges, the country should be prepared to absorb retaliation or to protect itself from it.” Kuperwasser was indirectly referring to a statement by Vice Premier Shimon Peres that “Iran, too, can be destroyed”. Peres’ statement drew criticism from Israeli defence circles.³⁵

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert hinted that he was prepared to take “extraordinary measures in order to stop the Iranian nuclear programme”.³⁶ Although he has not elaborated on his statement, he possibly was alluding to a military operation against the Iranian nuclear facilities. Nonetheless, it can be suggested that a division into pro- and contra- operation against Iranian facilities in addition to military establishments has also emerged between former Prime Ministers of Israel. For instance, Ehud Barak has counselled a cautious track on Iran, while Benjamin Netanyahu has urged pre-emptive action. Like Ehud Olmert, Shimon Peres endorses Western efforts to curb Iran’s nuclear ambitions through diplomacy but refuses to rule out force as a last resort.³⁷

According to a Tel Aviv University poll concluded in early May 2006, while 78 per cent of the Israeli public accepts official assessments that Iran now constitutes a real danger to Israel’s existence, only 37 per cent believes Israel should act independently to destroy Iran’s nuclear facilities.³⁸ As a result, there is currently a clear lack of public support for Israeli action. Support is likely to increase if the government explains to the public in clear terms the inevitability and necessity of any Israeli action. It appears that so far the Israeli government has kept its own public out of the debate relating to potential military actions. Whether a clear lack of public support for Israel’s going it alone would have any effect on the government decision-making process is not known.

Potential operation: facts and practicalities

It is impossible to damage Iran’s nuclear capability comprehensively by attacking a single installation. In order to achieve comprehensive damage, it would be necessary to attack, based on accurate intelligence, at least three or four facilities associated with uranium enrichment and plutonium production. It is doubtful if a surprise attack might be achieved, since the Iranians fear an Israeli attack and have taken this into account when planning their facilities.³⁹ At the same time, it remains unknown to what degree Iran is capable of maintaining a long-term high alert against a potential Israeli air operation, in particular high-alert of its air-defence forces. As a result, it can be suggested that the Israeli Air Force (IAF) can rely upon a certain degree of surprise.

Any operation in Iran is liable to obligate prior coordination with the US, in order to avoid a clash with US forces in the Persian Gulf. This coordination would also be required because Iran might well retaliate against US targets, and it will therefore be important to inform the US in advance of a strike.⁴⁰ Is this a feasible scenario? If yes, under what circumstances?

In recent months, US and Israeli officials have worked harder to coordinate responses should diplomacy fail to dissuade Iran’s nuclear ambitions. Despite such consultations, however, many Israelis insist that both countries must maintain options for independent action. David Ivry, the former IAF commander, said that operational coordination with Washington may not be possible if the Israeli government determines it must resort to pre-emptive military force. “This kind of operation cannot be done in consultation, not Iraq, not Entebbe and not Iran.

Otherwise, it endangers the lives of our military forces.”⁴¹ It remains, however, unclear whether other government officials share Ivry’s point of view. It is also unknown to what degree Ivry’s point of view may affect Dan Halutz’s opinion. After all, both men have been commanders of the IAF. According to the recent *Haaretz* analysis, Israel, although committed to close coordination with Washington, had no alternative but to support the recent US proposal for talks with Iran. This is the price of President Bush’s promise “to come to the aid of Israel if it is attacked”.⁴²

Ephraim Kam has set out a very clear set of conditions essential to the success of a military operation.⁴³ These will not be repeated in this paper. Addressing the practicalities of a potential operation against Iran, Brigadier General Amir Eshel, the IAF’s Chief of Staff, said that “the complexity of operations in a range greater than 1,000 kilometres rises exponentially. In these cases we have a very limited ability to surprise.” However, he continued, “the IAF will know how to address the challenges”. As a result, it can be said that talk of a potential Israeli strike on Iran has intensified, as there is a growing sentiment among Israel’s defence establishment that the diplomatic effort against Iran will bear no fruit.⁴⁴

According to Shlomo Brom, based on the past performance of the IAF, it is possible to determine that at long ranges (more than 600 kilometres), the IAF is capable of a few surgical strikes, but it is not capable of a sustained air campaign against a full array of targets.⁴⁵ Iran is, however, more than 1,000 kilometres from Israel. All the meaningful nuclear targets are, and most probably will continue to be, situated far from its Western borders. That means that once Israel decides to attack Iran’s nuclear facilities, it will have to plan a sustainable attack on a number of targets that are situated between 1,500 and 1,700 kilometres from Israel. For this, Israel can use only its air force. Although Israel has some military relationships with friendly states closer to Iran, most notably Turkey and India, these states are also keeping a friendly relationship with Iran, and it is highly unlikely that they would let Israel use their territories for the purpose of attacking Iran’s nuclear infrastructure. This means that the Israeli attack aircraft would have to take off from air bases in Israel, fly between 1,500 and 1,700 kilometres to the targets, destroy them, and then fly back the same distance.⁴⁶

The IAF does not have any bombers. Its air fleet consists only of fighter-bombers with a limited range. Israel has 25 F-15I and 137 F-16C/D fighter-bombers. It improved its long range capability in 2004 with a few operational F-16I aircraft with greater range than the F-15I, but the burden of the attacks would be laid mostly on the F-15I aircraft that have better capabilities at longer ranges.⁴⁷ Another problem, as Brom noted, is that the real operational radius is even shorter because, for parts of the route, the planes would have to fly at low altitude to avoid radar detection. Although that shortens the range of flight because of higher fuel consumption at low altitudes, it means that the attack aircraft would need to be refuelled at least twice: on their way to the targets and from the targets. That adds complication to the operation because Israel has only a few air-refuellers based on Boeing 707 aircraft platforms. Such aircraft are very vulnerable, and therefore air-refuelling cannot take place in hostile air space.⁴⁸

As late as June 2006 Israel decided to consider a proposal from Boeing to extend the operating range of its 25 F-15I strike aircraft⁴⁹ delivered in 1998. Even if Israel did agree with Boeing’s proposal, it is highly unlikely that the work to extend the operating range of the F-15I will be completed by the end of 2006.

In case of an attack from Iran

As a result of the seriousness of the threat emanating from Iran, there are several suggestions in the Israeli press as to what Israel should do and what Israel has already done or is currently doing.

According to *Haaretz*, from the offensive perspective, it seems Israel should strengthen its abilities in the realm of long-distance cruise missiles. It must get aid for the acquisition of advanced planes in the future, which will be very costly. Israel should be equipped with special ammunition meant to penetrate deep bunkers, like the Americans had in Afghanistan. Iran must know that Israel has the capability of reaching complex military targets.⁵⁰ This is undoubtedly a crucial psychological point, although whether this will deter Iran from attacking Israel remains to be seen.

From the defence aspect there are also ways to strengthen Israel. The country wants to step up its ability to develop unmanned long range weapons systems and is weighing additions to its Arrow anti-tactical ballistic missile (ATBM) system. Israel must receive aid in all these realms because, if it does not, all it will have is pretty headlines.⁵¹

1. Missile defence and early-warning capabilities

One Israeli official noted that Israel is beefing up its missile defences and early-warning capabilities. Its single operational Arrow-2 ATBM battery will probably be joined by two others by the end of 2006, allowing the interception of missiles up to 150 kilometres outside its border. Israel is also considering building interceptors that can hit a ballistic missile just after lift-off.⁵² In December 2005, Israel's defence against an Iranian ballistic missile strike, the Arrow-2 missile system, succeeded in intercepting an incoming rocket simulating an Iranian Shihab-3. Major Elyakim, commander of the Arrow missile battery at Palmahim air base, told *The Jerusalem Post* in April 2006 that the missile crews were always on high alert, but that they were recently instructed to "raise their level of awareness" because of developments on the Iranian front. Experts believe that if Iran is attacked by Israel or the US, Tehran would respond by firing long-range ballistic missiles (LRBM) at Israel.⁵³

Meanwhile, in May 2006 the Israeli Air Force quietly declared improved Block 3 versions of the Arrow ATBM system operational. Israeli Air Force and MoD sources said that they are already designing building blocks for the new Arrow Block 4 system. This system is planned for deployment around 2009.⁵⁴

2. Earth Remote Observation Satellite (EROS)

In an effort to increase surveillance of suspected military developments in Iran's nuclear programme, Israel launched the EROS-B1 on 25 April 2006.⁵⁵ This satellite is returning excellent high-resolution imagery, enabling the IDF to double its overhead monitoring of Iranian and Syrian facilities along with other potential threats.⁵⁶ Undoubtedly such monitoring sends a clear signal to Iran that Israel is watching what is happening in Iran with increased vigilance and, as a result, Iran stands little chance of surprising Israel, although a surprise can not be ruled out.

3. Short-Range Ballistic Missile Defence

The MoD has selected the Rafael Armament Development Authority (also known as Rafael) and Raytheon over a competing team of Israel Aircraft Industries (IAI) and Boeing to develop the newest layer in the nation's multi-tiered defensive umbrella known as the Short-Range Ballistic Missile Defence (SRBMD) against rocket and missile attacks. Aimed at shooting down weapons coming in from 40 to 250

kilometres away, the planned SRBMD effort has assumed greater urgency due to escalating tensions over Iran's purported nuclear weapons drive.⁵⁷ Raytheon has said that the consortium planned to achieve operational capability by 2011.⁵⁸

4. Additional tools of deterrence

In the coming months, Israel plans to launch its first radar satellite whose synthetic-aperture beams can spy through clouds and bad weather to detect changes on the ground in Iran. Similarly, the Israeli Navy (IN) is working diligently with German shipbuilders to finalise contractual details for another two submarines that promise to extend Tel Aviv's strategic ability to deter or respond to an Iranian attack.⁵⁹ The first submarine will be delivered in six years, namely by 2012, and the second a year later, in 2013. In the late 1990s, the IN put in service three Dolphin I submarines.⁶⁰

Former chief of Mossad, Efraim Halevy, said in early August 2006 that Israel has the capability to prevent itself being eliminated by Iran.⁶¹ He has not, however, further elaborated on the issue. The author can only assume that in addition to various tools of deterrence mentioned above there are certain other tools that are likely to be used against potential attack from Iran.

International Reaction

US President George Bush said at the American Jewish Committee conference in Washington that the United States had a strong and inalienable obligation to ensure the security of Israel, referring to the threats Iran had made against Israel.⁶² In a recent issue of *Haaretz* it was noted that headlines about President Bush's promises to defend Israel in the case of an attack should not suffice. Israel must strive to reach an agreement with Washington about how to increase its deterrent capabilities, including against long-range threats. Iran is threatening Israel from a distance, but is managing to build up short- and medium-range threats against it as well.⁶³

Israeli analysts argue that Israel must also prepare in advance for a scenario in which Iran will possess nuclear weapons, despite its efforts to prevent this. Part of these preparations must involve an effort to reach agreement with the US administration that if Iran acquires nuclear weapons, the administration will clearly and explicitly declare that any Iranian nuclear attack against Israel or any other ally of the US would be regarded as a nuclear attack against the US itself and would prompt a commensurate response. Such a declaration must also make clear that the US will not tolerate even a threat of an Iranian nuclear attack against its allies. It may be assumed that such a prior declaration would form a principal deterrent against Iran and would help to mitigate the impact of an Iranian nuclear threat.⁶⁴

The media note that George Bush, Jacques Chirac, Tony Blair and Angela Merkel understand that they are facing a menacing confrontation with Iran. So do some of Israel's leaders. An article in *Haaretz* insisted that the strategic institutions of the United States, France, Germany, the UK and Israel are working in close, serious and substantive co-operation, as is appropriate to the situation,⁶⁵ although it did not elaborate what it is actually meant by that. The author can only assume that perhaps military planning committees have been working for some time and continue to work on potential scenarios of military strike. The author has, however, no evidence to support this claim. It is more or less certain that any US attack on Iran will have to be made without its European partners, excluding perhaps the

United Kingdom. It can be foreseen, however, that the reaction of the European Union member states will be rather muted.

The Jerusalem Post learned that in June 2006 Russia sent messages to Israel through US intermediaries voicing opposition to a possible military attack on Iran's nuclear facilities. While Israel and Russia have good relations and a direct line of communications, it argued that the Russians chose to use the US to deliver this message of military restraint out of a belief that Jerusalem pays closer attention to messages from Washington rather than from Moscow.⁶⁶ This was the first explicit signal from Moscow to the government in Jerusalem. It can be suggested that despite Moscow's message Russia has a very small leverage over the Israeli decision to initiate a military attack. As a result, President Vladimir Putin and his government wish to reassure everyone involved, notably the governments of Iran, the United States and Israel, that officially Russia opposes a possible military attack. The position of Russia is unlikely to change in the short- to medium-term.

Conclusion

There are at least two critical junctions for a pre-emptive strike against Iran. The first one is that the military operation has to be launched before the Iranians cross the technical line – in a time frame between the end of December 2006 and mid-April 2007. The second junction named the time frame as before 2009 or 2010 when Iran would have the bomb. In both cases “the military option becomes exponentially more difficult to employ” and “IAF will have a very limited ability to surprise”.⁶⁷ In addition, there is no guarantee of a successful outcome of the military option but it might be the best solution under the present circumstances if the government of Iran continues its nuclear programme unabated and simultaneously stalls the diplomatic process under whatever guise.

Whether the military strike would deal a serious blow to the Iranian nuclear programme or just halt the programme for several years is difficult to say. At least the government of Iran might finally understand that the divided members of the UN Security Council are capable of uniting and dealing with Iran in a serious and substantial manner. Until now the government of Iran has taken it for granted that the Big Five stand no chance of reaching a consensus and Iran still has time on its side. A decisive military strike, however, may cool down some heads in Iran and show that nothing can be taken for granted. As a result, it is important that the military strike will be led by the United States. As for Israeli participation, this remains debatable. On the other hand, a unilateral Israeli military strike will be of no use to the Big Five and may divide them more than ever. Undoubtedly, if the United States reluctantly backed by China and Russia proceeded to execute the military mission decisively, this would be welcomed by the government of Israel.

Endnotes

¹ For a complete article, see <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/717210.html> - online on 18 May 2006.

² *Defense News*, 29 May 2006, 6.

³ *Tel Aviv Notes*, 31, 10 February 2002, <http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss/taunotes.html>, hereafter cited as Ephraim Kam, “Israel's Assessment”. A similar idea was expressed by General Moshe Yaalon, former Chief of Staff. He noted that a nuclear capability in the hands of a radical regime in Iran that does not hide its intentions regarding Israel [namely, to wipe Israel from the face of the earth] would fundamentally alter the strategic balance in the region. <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=11508858> - online on 26 June 2006.

For the issue of pre-2000 Israeli reporting and perception, see David Menashri, *Post-Revolutionary Politics in Iran. Religion, Society and Power*. London, Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass, 2001, 295-296.

⁴ "Israel's Assessment".

⁵ 12 January 2004, 1.

⁶ <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1143498842013&pagename=JPost%2FJP> - online on 12 April 2006

⁷ <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/705169.html> - online on 12 April 2006

⁸ <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?apage=4&cid> - online on 2 June 2006

⁹ *Defense News*, 29 May 2006, 6.

¹⁰ *Defense News*, 12 January 2004, 8. Israel's Chief of Military Intelligence, Amos Yadlin, is convinced that Israel and the West do not know everything about the Iranian nuclear project. He thinks it is possible that Iran has a Plan B that it has kept hidden from the West. "It has already been shown that there are activities that the Iranians have not reported to the IAEA." <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/705169.html> - online on 12 April 2006. See also <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=11500358> - online on 12 June 2006.

¹¹ <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/610492.html> - online on 9 August 2005.

¹² For such an assessment, see Ephraim Kam, "Curbing the Iranian nuclear threat: The military option" in *Strategic Assessment*, 7:3 (December 2004),

<http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss/sa/v7n3p2Kam.html>, hereafter cited as Ephraim Kam, "Curbing the Iranian".

¹³ <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/713641.html> - online on 9 May 2006. See also *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 17 May 2006, 17. For further reports indicating that this is a world-wide issue and not that of Israel alone, see

<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?apage=4&cid> - online on 2 June 2006;

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/727814.html> - online on 16 June 2006;

<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?c=JPArticle&cid=1153291> - online on 21 July 2006.

¹⁴ <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/713641.html> - online on 9 May 2006;

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/727814.html> - online on 16 June 2006;

<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1150885884780&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull> - online on 30 June 2006.

¹⁵ <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/714579.html> - online on 11 May 2006;

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/714500.html> - online on 11 May 2006.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ *Defense News*, 12 January 2004, 8. See also Efraim Inbar, "The need to block a nuclear Iran" in *Mideast Security and Policy Studies* 67. Bar-Ilan University, BESA: April 2006, 17-18.

¹⁸ <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1143498842013&pagename=JPost%2FJP> - online on 12 April 2006. See also note 27.

¹⁹ <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?apage=2&cid=1143498842013&pagename=JP> - online on 12 April 2006. See also <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/713641.html> - online on 9 May 2006; <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?apage=4&cid> - online on 2 June 2006). According to

<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1150885973179&page> - online on 12 July 2006, on 17 July 2006, after the G-8 leaders held working meetings over the weekend and all the players were in place, the decisions were supposed to be made on whether Iran will be stopped, and if so, how. The decisions, however, have not yet been made and the situation remains as before unresolved.

²⁰ <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/724869.html> - online on 9 June 2006.

²¹ For further information, see

<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1150886032085&page> - online on 18 July 2006; <http://www.defensenews.com/story.php?F=1991298&C=mideast> - online on 31 July 2006;

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/744833.html> - online on 1 August 2006;

<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1153292053776&page> - online on 1 August 2006;

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/745315.html> - online on 2 August 2006.

However, experts from the JCSS agree that Tehran is gleeful over the conflict - which distracts international attention away from its nuclear aspirations.

<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1150886039014&page> - online on 19 July

2006. A similar point was recently made by A. M. Vartanyan, an expert with the Moscow-based Institute of Near East (Institut Blizhnego Vostoka). "Livano-izrail'skii konflikt s iranskogo ugla", ("Lebanese-Israeli conflict from the Iranian angle"), see <http://www.iimes.ru/rus/stat/2006/24-07-06a.htm> – online on 24 July 2006.

²² <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/714500.html> – online on 11 May 2006. Although Eiland's request is understandable the Security Council powers individually pursue a slightly different agenda and, as a result, it is extremely difficult for them to speak with "one voice". This point has been well understood and astutely exploited by the government of Iran. See also <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/736827.html> – online on 11 July 2006.

²³ <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/708470.html> – online on 25 April 2006. See also <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/713641.html> – online on 9 May 2006; <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/727814.html> – online on 16 June 2006. As early as December 2004 Ephraim Kam has mentioned such a possibility. See "Curbing the Iranian". See also *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, 10 July 2006, 23.

²⁴ <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/714500.html> – online on 11 May 2006.

Regarding a regional arms race, see Ephraim Kam, "Israel's Assessment".

²⁵ <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/714500.html> – online on 11 May 2006.

²⁶ <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1145961324144&pagename=JPost%2FJPost> – online on 11 May 2006. Iran's delivery of advanced rockets and missiles, including the powerful C-802 anti-ship cruise missile to Hizbullah should raise alarm among officials of the Israeli defence establishment. For the list of missile and rocket systems delivered by Iran to Hizbullah, see *Defense News*, 24 July 2006, 1. It is important to note that the list is not complete.

²⁷ <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/717210.html> – online on 18 May 2006. See also <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1150885973179&page> – online on 12 July 2006.

²⁸ <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/719112.html> – online on 24 May 2006. General Amos Yadlin believes that "Iran will achieve a nuclear weapon by 2010". *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 17 May 2006, 17. See also <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/749190.html> – online on 11 August 2006. Tehran understands that once Iran has the bomb, the chances of the US attacking it will diminish <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/736827.html> – online on 11 July 2006.

²⁹ <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/719102.html> – online on 26 May 2006; <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/725858> – online on 12 June 2006: see also note 13.

³⁰ <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1145961294729&pag> – online on 7 May 2006

³¹ "Curbing the Iranian".

³² <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/714500.html> – online on 11 May 2006. *Haaretz* has not, however, elaborated on why Israel is not capable of tackling Iran's facilities alone.

³³ <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1145961309184&pagename=JPost%2FJPost> – online on 9 May 2006.

³⁴ <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1143498842013&pagename=JPost%2FJPost> – online on 12 April 2006. See also <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/705169.html> – online on 12 April 2006; <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?apage=4&cid> – online on 2 June 2006.

³⁵ *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 17 May 2006, 17.

³⁶ <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/725858> – online on 12 June 2006.

³⁷ <http://www.defensenews.com/story.php?F=1879904&C=mideast> – online on 19 June 2006. For Netanyahu's position, see <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/717210.html> – online on 18 May 2006. As a result, the author disagrees with Shlomo Brom's clear division into two distinctive schools of thought in Israel regarding perceptions of the Iranian threat. ("Is the Begin doctrine still a viable option for Israel?" in H. Sokolski and P. Clawson (eds). *Getting ready for a nuclear-ready Iran*. Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle: Pennsylvania, 2005, 145-146). A variety of nuances can be discerned within military and political circles.

³⁸ *Defense News*, 29 May 2006, 6.

³⁹ E. Kam, "Curbing the Iranian". The net effect is that any attempt to attack the Iranian nuclear programme would necessitate sustainable attacks on a relatively large number of targets that are well-defended, passively and actively. S. Brom, "Is the Begin doctrine..."; 147.

⁴⁰ E. Kam, "Curbing the Iranian". This may make such operation extremely cumbersome and very difficult to implement. According to Shlomo Brom flying over Iraq without coordination with the United States would lead to a clash with US interceptors. Any attempt at coordination with the United States and the UK or asking permission from Jordan might compromise the operation. ("Is the Begin doctrine..."; 148.) Here lie the dilemmas for the Israeli Air Force, namely how to reconcile two opposite coordination efforts and to proceed with the operation.

⁴¹ *Defense News*, 29 May 2006, 6.

⁴² <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/724869.html> - online on 9 June 2006.

⁴³ "Curbing the Iranian". See also Tom Cooper and Liam F. Delvin, "Iran. A formidable opponent", *Combat Aircraft*, 7:6 (May 2006), 35.

⁴⁴ *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 17 May 2006, 17. See also

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/717210.html> - online on 18 May 2006. For an earlier report, see Efraim Inbar, "The need to block"; 23. For a clear and sharp analysis of why the US-led diplomatic effort against Iran will bear no fruit, see Ephraim Asculai, "Is there a diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear issue?" in *Tel Aviv Notes*, 170, 22 May 2006, <http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss/taunotes.html>. See also <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/740444.html> - online on 20 July 2006. This point is not equally shared by everyone involved. For instance, Lieutenant General Dan Halutz does not share this point of view. For further information, see

<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?apage=4&cid> - online on 2 June 2006.

⁴⁵ "Is the Begin doctrine"; 142-143.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*; 148. For the Turkish unlikely yes, see Eugene Kogan, "Co-operation in the Israeli-Turkish Defence Industry" in Conflict Studies Research Centre (CSRC), Middle East Series, 05/43, 16, <http://www.da.mod/csrc> - online September 2005. In addition, according to <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1134309632390&page> - online on 23 December 2005, the Turkish warned [implicitly Lieutenant General Dan Halutz] that any IDF plan to intervene in Iran would be very risky for the future of the volatile Middle East, and that diplomacy should be the preferred solution. Although General Halutz has not asked the Turkish military what would happen if the diplomatic solution fails, it can be suggested that the Turkish military would not change its mind.

⁴⁷ S. Brom, "Is the Begin doctrine"; 148. The Israel Air Force is building a long strategic arm to cope with distant threats, mainly from Iran. In February 2004, it began receiving new Lockheed Martin F-16I Sufa (Storm) multirole fighters. *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 17 November 2004, 26. For the strength of the Israeli Air Force, see Bill Norton, "Israel Air Force" in *Air Forces Monthly* (August 2004), 57. The same source also noted that the IAF will have 102 F-16Is by 2008. *Ibid*; 60-61. According to *Defense News* (17 July 2006, 24) two squadrons of F-16I are operational and the third was dedicated in ceremonies in Israel in early July 2006.

⁴⁸ "Is the Begin doctrine"; 149.

⁴⁹ *Flight International*, 6-12 June 2006, 20.

⁵⁰ <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/722008.html> - online on 1 June 2006.

⁵¹ <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/722008.html> - online on 1 June 2006.

⁵² *Defense News*, 12 January 2004, 8. According to *Defense News* Israel had by June 2006 two Arrow batteries and two batteries of enhanced US-built Patriot Advanced Capability-2 (also known as PAC-2) missiles available (29 May 2006, 6). Thus, the third Arrow battery is likely to become operational by the end of 2006. According to Bill Norton on 6 October 2000 the first of two Arrow ATBM batteries were brought into operation ("Israel Air Force"; 64). See also Efraim Inbar, "The need to block"; 8.

⁵³ <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=11482878> - online on 24 May 2006. For an earlier report, see *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 17 November 2004, 26. For other Iranian possible responses see S. Brom, "Is the Begin doctrine"; 151-153.

⁵⁴ For a complete article, see *Defense News*, 29 May 2006, 6.

⁵⁵ For a complete article, see *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 3 May 2006, 6. For an earlier reports concerning the launch, see <http://www.defensenews.com/story.php?F=1729480> - online on 25 April 2006; <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/ShArt.jhtml?it> - online on 25 April 2006; <http://www.oborona.ru/tnews/?pid=2003023> - online on 25 April 2006; <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?c=JPArticle&C> - online on 26 April 2006; <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc.html?docId=670105> - online on 27 April 2006.

⁵⁶ *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, 15 May 2006, 26.

⁵⁷ For a complete article, see *Defense News*, 15 May 2006, 24. See also *Space News International*, 15 May 2006, 20; <http://www.globes.co.il/serveen/globes/docview.asp?d> - online on 25 May 2006. For further details on the system, see *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 14 June 2006, 38.

⁵⁸ <http://www.globes.co.il/serveen/globes/docview.asp?d> - online on 25 May 2006.

⁵⁹ *Defense News*, 29 May 2006, 6.

⁶⁰ For a complete article, see

<http://www.globes.co.il/serveen/globes/docview.asp?did=100011> – online on 18 July 2006.

⁶¹ <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1154525832743&page> – online on 9 August 2006.

⁶² <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=11459612> - online on 5 May 2006. President George Bush said that he told Prime Minister Ehud Olmert “in the event of any attack on Israel, the United States would come to Israel’s assistance”. *Defense News*, 29 May 2006, 6. Iran is aware of the strategic links between the US and Israel and knows of the American administration’s commitment to Israel’s security. E. Kam, “Curbing the Iranian”.

⁶³ <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/722008.html> - online on 1 June 2006.

⁶⁴ E. Kam, “Curbing the Iranian”.

⁶⁵ <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/714579.html> - online on 11 May 2006.

⁶⁶ <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=11495726> - online on 9 June 2006.

⁶⁷ <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/717210.html> - online on 18 May 2006. See also <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1150885973179&page> – online on 12 July 2006.

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See:

Efraim Inbar, "The need to block a nuclear Iran", Bar-Ilan University, Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 2006.

Ephraim Kam, "Curbing the Iranian nuclear threat: the military option", Tel Aviv University, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 2004.

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Fax: (44) 1793 788841
Email: csrc@da.mod.uk
<http://www.da.mod.uk/csrc>

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