



THE SABAN CENTER FOR
MIDDLE EAST POLICY
AT THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

ANALYSIS PAPER
Number 2, March 2004

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ISRAEL'S NATIONAL SECURITY DOCTRINE
AFTER THE FALL OF SADDAM

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Throughout the decades of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Iraq has always been one of the most hostile and militant of Israel's neighbors. The threat of a combined attack from the east by a Syrian force in the Golan Heights and Iraq, Jordan and possibly Saudi Arabia along the 150 mile Jordanian-Israeli border, has been a nightmare scenario for Israeli defense planners. To prevent such a contingency the Israel Defense Force (IDF) has always prepared to deploy heavy forces along the Jordan River Valley in order to destroy enemy forces on their own territory. Consequently, with the exception of the government headed by Ehud Barak, all Israeli governments held that permanent control over the Jordan River Valley is essential to Israel's security and should not be ceded even in the framework of a permanent peace agreement with the Palestinians. Operation Iraqi Freedom and the destruction of Saddam Hussein's military defused this threat. With no Iraqi military that can attack from the east, Israel's defense doctrine requires reevaluation.

This paper analyzes the changes in the Arab-Israeli military balance in light of the disintegration of the Iraqi military, outlining the conventional and non-conventional threats potentially facing Israel. It assesses the prospects and viability of a conventional attack on the eastern front in both the short and long run. It then revisits the concept of secure borders along Israel's eastern front, examining whether Israel's

rationale for control of the Valley is consistent with the changes in its strategic environment.

The paper concludes that with the decline of the Iraqi military the Arab-Israeli military balance has shifted in favor of Israel and that in the short run the threat of an eastern front no longer exists. But despite the improvement in Israel's strategic posture, it is premature to assume that the threat from the east has been permanently removed and that the Valley is no longer essential to Israel's security. There are still several unknowns including the nature of the new Iraqi regime and the changes, if any, that may take place in Jordan and Syria, as well as the impact of *Pax Americana* in the Middle East on the behavior of the Palestinians and countries like Iran, Syria, Libya, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon.

The Jordan River Valley has an additional role no less important than preventing and deterring an attack from the east. The Valley separates the future Palestinian state from Jordan in case the Palestinians ever try to undermine and topple the Jordanian monarchy. Therefore, Israeli presence along the Jordan River is of critical importance to the security and stability of the Hashemite regime. Additionally, a joint Jordanian-Palestinian border and Palestinian control over the bridges of the Jordan River would deny Israel the ability to monitor those entering and exiting the area and allow the

Palestinians to import heavy weapons, terrorists, and military reinforcements from abroad.

Nevertheless, if and when progress toward a permanent agreement resumes, Israel would surely be expected to alter its approach to deploying forces in the Jordan Valley. It will be required to articulate a new rationale for its insistence on continuous control of this territory. Adherence to the old mantra that the Valley is a buffer against an eastern front is not likely to resonate even with many of Israel's friends in the United States. On the other hand, to legitimize the Valley's role as a buffer between Jordan and the West Bank, Israel will have to make a strong case why destabilization of Jordan is likely and why this could significantly undermine Israel's security. Furthermore, such a claim could only be accepted if Jordan supports it either publicly or privately.

If Israel were required to relinquish control over the Valley as part of a final status agreement, such a withdrawal should include a test period of at least a decade before complete hand-over of the Valley takes place. In the interim period, Israel and the Palestinians can agree on certain security arrangements regarding the future of the Valley that would address Israel's security concerns without infringing on Palestinian sovereignty in the Valley.

A withdrawal would have significant ramifications on Israel's defense doctrine and force structure. Without full control of the Valley it will be more difficult for Israel to shift the battleground into neighboring territory and achieve a rapid victory the way it has done in previous wars. Without heavy forces near the bridges Israel would have to rely mostly on its airpower in order to prevent enemy forces from moving west of the Jordan River. Israel will need to develop a much more robust strategic branch capable of using long-range weapons to deal with over-the-horizon threats. Currently, Israel's strategic forces are primarily designed for deterrence and defensive purposes. But were it to relinquish control of the Valley, Israel would have to significantly increase its arsenal of high-precision conventional surface-to-surface missiles capable of hitting distant enemy targets at great accuracy.

THE AUTHOR

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He is a lieutenant colonel in the IDF reserves. In his military career he commanded combat battalions in various districts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and worked with the Palestinian Authority since its inauguration in 1994. Luft holds a doctorate in strategic studies from the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), Johns Hopkins University.

I. INTRODUCTION

In March 2003, when it became clear that Baghdad was about to fall, Israeli Air Force Commander Major General Dan Halutz circulated a reconstruction proposal to the Israeli general staff suggesting that in light of the collapse of the Iraqi Army, Israel no longer faced a conventional threat from the east and should therefore trim down its armored forces and invest in military solutions to combat the more pressing threats of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction.¹ The lessons of modern warfare, he claimed, required a smaller, professional Israeli military with ground forces that were lighter and more mobile than the current force structure. Modern warfare also required increased use of special forces to deal with the day-to-day security challenges of Israel's war on terrorism. Such reform would also be necessary because Israel's defense budget constraints had become more pressing than ever. Indeed, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have already embarked upon one of the most comprehensive reforms in its history, with up to 20 percent of Israel's ground forces slated to be cut over the next five years. As part of the plan, old platforms are to be replaced with new technologies and more than 1,000 M-60 tanks will be taken out of service.² This will make the IDF leaner and more efficient but no less prepared to confront the threats emanating from the new Middle East, whatever they might be.

However, implementing major changes in force structure without addressing the fundamental question of what national security doctrine this force will serve defies the logic of defense planning. Before undergoing far reaching structural changes, Israel's defense establishment requires clear guidance from its political-military leadership regarding what they would consider to be secure borders for Israel under a permanent status agreement with the Palestinians, as well as the new "red lines" for Israel's security in the post-Saddam era. With the new borders and red lines in mind, the IDF could then devise the most appropriate doctrine to defend the country. And only then could the IDF update its force structure to optimize its capabilities and prepare it effectively for the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Though mostly based on enduring strategic and geopolitical assumptions, Israel's national security doctrine has been sensitive to the changing strategic landscape of the Middle East. Formative events like the Arab-Israeli wars, the signing of the peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, the two Palestinian uprisings, and the 1991 Gulf War all triggered psychological, operational, technological, and structural changes in Israel's defense establishment and had significant influence on its foreign and defense policy, its allocation of

1 *Ha'aretz*, 28 March 2003.

2 *Ha'aretz*, 25 May 2003.

national resources, its relations with its neighbors, and its willingness to make concessions for peace.³

The latest of those seminal events is Operation Iraqi Freedom and the removal of Saddam Hussein from power. Throughout the decades of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Iraq has always been one of the most hostile and militant of Israel's neighbors. Especially since the end of the Iran-Iraq war, Baghdad posed a major challenge for Israel in three threat categories: conventional attack (in conjunction with one or more of Israel's neighbors), ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction, and terrorism.

With the exception of Israel's Lebanon War and the 1956 Sinai-Suez War, Iraq took an active part in all of the Arab-Israeli wars, sending expeditionary forces to assist Syria, Jordan and Egypt in their war effort. In 1948, Iraq sent four brigades to Samaria to help the Arab armies snuff out the new State of Israel and then, alone among the major participants, refused to sign an armistice agreement with Israel. In the early 1960s, Iraq deployed a mechanized force in eastern Jordan, which remained until 1971. This force was decimated by Israeli air strikes during the 1967 War and therefore never took part in the combat operations. During the 1973 War, Baghdad scraped together everything it possibly could, mustering an armored corps of two divisions and several independent brigades to fight alongside the Syrian army in the Golan Heights. In fact, the arrival of the Iraqi expeditionary force saved the Syrian army from complete destruction and stopped the Israeli advance toward Damascus.

Consequently, Israel always assumed that in the event of a war with an Arab coalition, Iraqi ground forces would take an active role in the fighting and the large Iraqi army could serve as a strategic reserve for the Jordanian and Syrian armies. Iraq never concealed its intentions in this regard. It built military infrastructure in western Iraq, invested in tank transporters and other logistic equipment to be able to move an armored corps westward in case of a conflict, and during the late 1980s, created a joint fighter squadron with Jordan that flew photoreconnaissance missions along the Jordan valley.

In the non-conventional sphere, Iraq's development of chemical and biological weapons as well as its active pursuit of nuclear weapons and long-range ballistic missiles made it, together with Iran, an existential threat to Israel. The unprovoked Iraqi attack on Israel with 39 Scud missiles during the 1991 Gulf War, as well as statements by Iraqi officials to the effect that their weapons of mass destruction (WMD) program was designed to be used against Israel, only reaffirmed concerns that Saddam Hussein might one day use such weapons against Israel or provide them to other players in the region. This became the main motivation behind Israel's investment of vast resources in homeland defense including the development of the Arrow ballistic missile system as well as other strategic capabilities such as long-range surface-to-surface missiles, a surveillance satellite and, according to reports, a nuclear arsenal and second-strike capability.⁴

3 In truth, there is no definitive document in the public domain stating Israel's national security doctrine. Several attempts to articulate all the elements of the doctrine have run into obstacles due to secrecy, political sensitivities, and the dynamism of the region. Over the years, several works have been published that captured the tenets of Israel's national security thinking. See Dan Horowitz, "The Concept of National Security and the Prospect for Peace in the Middle East," in Gabriel Scheffer, *Dynamics of a Conflict: Reexamination of the Arab Israeli Conflict*, (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1975); Israel Tal, *National Security: The Few Against the Many*, (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1996) [Hebrew]; Efraim Inbar, "Contours of Israel's New Strategic Thinking," *Political Science Quarterly*, (Spring 1996): 41-64; Avner Yaniv ed. *National Security and Democracy in Israel*, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1993); Yoav Ben-Horin and Barry Posen, *Israel's Strategic Doctrine* (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 1981); Eliot A. Cohen, Michael J. Eisenstadt, and Andrew J. Bacevich, *Knives, Tanks, and Missiles: Israel's Security Revolution*, (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1998); Michael Handel, "The Evolution of Israeli Strategy: The Psychology of Insecurity and the Quest for Absolute Security," in Williamson Murray, MacGregor Knox, and Alvin Bernstein, eds., *The Making of Strategy: Rulers, States, and War*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 534-578; Bard E. O'Neill, "Israel," in Douglas J. Murray and Paul R. Viotti, eds., *The Defense Policies of Nations*, (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 497-541; and Avner Yaniv, *Deterrence Without the Bomb: The Politics of Israeli Strategy*, (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1987).

4 Joseph Cirincione, *Deadly Arsenal*, (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002), 221-233.

In the terrorism sphere, Iraq over the years served as a safe haven for a variety of Palestinian rejectionist groups including Abu Nidal's organization and the Arab Liberation Front. Saddam Hussein's regime may have had some kind of relationship with al-Qa'ida, and emerged as an important sponsor of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad during the second *intifada*, sending millions of dollars to families of suicide bombers in Gaza and the West Bank.

Undoubtedly, the destruction of Saddam's military and the establishment of a pro-Western, potentially democratic, regime supported by the presence of U.S. forces on the ground over the next several years constitutes a major improvement in Israel's strategic posture that should trigger changes in Israel's national security doctrine. The doctrine specifies the principles by which Israel hopes to deter its Arab neighbors from initiating a war against it, and the way to defeat them if deterrence fails. One of its tenets is that Israel cannot afford to accommodate a full-scale war on its territory because of its lack of strategic depth, and therefore must seek to win wars by destroying enemy forces through preemptive and preventive action in the enemy's territory. If political or strategic circumstances make preemption impossible—as in 1973—Israel must instead be able to defend fixed lines along defensible geographic barriers.⁵ Additionally, Israel has always sought to win its wars quickly using offensive maneuver warfare. Rapid victory was necessary not only to preempt international intervention and avoid shutting off the Israeli economy for an extended period of time (or crippling it through a protracted call-up of the reserves), but also to avoid fighting with expeditionary forces from a country like Iraq. But now, with no Iraqi military willing or able to pitch in from the east, Israel's defense doctrine has become somewhat obsolete. In fact, after the fall of Baghdad, Israel's military intelligence chief Major General Aharon Ze'evi-Farkash commented, "there is no longer an eastern front."⁶

The concept of an "eastern front" refers to an Israeli nightmare scenario of an attack from the east by a Syrian force against the Golan Heights combined with an attack by Iraq, Jordan and possibly Saudi Arabia along the 150 mile Jordanian-Israeli border. This scenario effectively assumes that the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty collapses as a result of the fall of the Hashemite Kingdom, leaving Jordan to become a staging ground for such an attack. Most of these worst-case scenarios also assume that the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza Strip would launch a guerrilla campaign to sabotage Israeli deployments and block the central access roads essential for shifting forces to the front line.

To prevent such a scenario, the IDF's defense plan stresses the rapid deployment of heavy forces along the Jordan River Valley—700 square miles of semi-arid plain, roughly 50 miles long and 10 miles wide, bisected by the Jordan River flowing down to the Dead Sea basin and almost devoid of a Palestinian population. According to IDF planning assumptions, as long as Israel can control the Valley, the IDF believes that its small standing army will be able to hold off an assault by an Arab coalition long enough to allow Israel to mobilize and deploy its reserve forces, which constitute the bulk of its military power. The Jordan River Valley is also the potential staging ground for IDF forces in the event that Israel ever opted to mount a preemptive attack against Iraqi forces advancing through Jordanian territory. IDF doctrine sees the bridges over the Jordan River as key chokepoints, allowing Israel to move mechanized forces into Jordan and preventing Iraqi or Jordanian forces from advancing into Israel.

Israel's current national security doctrine makes it essential for Israel to retain control over these strategic zones under any permanent status agreement with the Palestinians. Likewise, it requires deployment of strategic installations, such as early warning stations

5 Aharon Yariv, "Strategic Depth—an Israeli View," *Ma'arachot*, (October 1979): 21–25. [Hebrew].

6 Dan Williams, "Israeli general says Iraq war has boosted security," Reuters, 26 April 2003.

and command posts along the eastern slopes of the mountain range of Judea and Samaria. Control over the main arteries leading to the Valley is also perceived to be essential. There are two major north-south emergency arteries: the Jordan Valley road from Beit She'an in the north to Ein Gedi in the south and the Allon Road from Mehola in the north to Ma'aleh Adumim and its extension to Arad. The staging areas for IDF forces in the case of a war extend up to two miles west of the Allon Road. In addition, there are at least four strategic east-west arteries for moving mobilized forces from Israel's population centers on the coastal plain to the eastern front: the North Trans-Samaria Road to the northern Jordan Valley, the Trans-Samaria Road to the central Jordan Valley, the Ma'aleh Beit Horon Road to Jericho, and the Trans-Etzion Road to the Dead Sea. In addition, the IDF feels it must control corridors one mile wide on each side of these arteries to ensure free and secure movement of IDF units in times of emergency.

With the exception of the government headed by Ehud Barak, all Israeli governments have insisted that permanent control over the Jordan River Valley is essential to Israel's security and should not be ceded even in the framework of a permanent peace agreement with the Palestinians. But with the removal of Saddam Hussein from power and a growing perception among Israelis that the threat of an eastern front no longer exists, it is worth revisiting the question of whether Israeli control over the Jordan River Valley is still essential to the security of the Jewish state.

Indeed, some Israeli leaders have begun to explore the potential of this changed strategic environment, and have incorporated it into recent unofficial Israeli-Palestinian peace proposals such as the Geneva Accords negotiated by Yossi Beilin and Yasser Abed Rabbo. The notion inherent in these approaches is that Israel should redefine its concept of "secure borders" and consider handing over the Jordan River Valley and the various road corridors to the Palestinians as part of a permanent

status agreement to grant the Palestinian state a joint border with Jordan. This would allow the free movement of goods, services and people so important to the Palestinians' economic development. Furthermore, it would remove IDF forces from the roads leading to the Valley, allowing a future Palestinian state to have territorial contiguity, at least within the West Bank.

Others, including Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz, and most members of the IDF General Staff, argue that despite the improvement in Israel's strategic posture it is premature to assume that the threat from the east has been permanently removed. The nature of the new Iraqi regime remains to be seen, as do the changes, if any, that may take place in Jordan and Syria. Another unknown they cite is whether the much ballyhooed *Pax Americana* in the Middle East will actually have a lasting impact on the behavior of the Palestinians as well as countries like Iran, Syria, Libya, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon.

Of greater importance, Sharon himself believes that Israeli control of the Jordan River Valley has an additional role no less critical than preventing and deterring an attack from the east. The zone spanning the Jordan Valley "serves the interests of other countries in the region" by separating the future Palestinian state from Jordan in case the Palestinians ever try to undermine or even topple the Jordanian monarchy. In other words, Israeli presence along the Jordan River is of critical importance to the security and stability of the Hashemite regime. In addition, a joint Jordanian-Palestinian border and Palestinian control over the bridges of the Jordan River would deny Israel the ability to monitor those entering and exiting the area and allow the Palestinians to smuggle in heavy weapons, terrorists, and military reinforcements from abroad, even if such were forbidden by the terms of an Israeli-Palestinian peace accord. Consequently, Sharon is adamant that the Palestinians, "must not sit on the banks of the Jordan River."⁷

⁷ This view has been expressed publicly and in print many times. See Jay Bushinsky, "Sharon to Present Cabinet with Maps of Security Zones," *Jerusalem Post*, 3 December 1997.

Thus, there is already a debate beginning to brew in Israel over the extent to which the demise of Saddam Hussein's Iraq means that Israel can radically alter its longstanding strategic perspective on the territory of the West Bank. Based on recent geopolitical changes in the region emanating from America's victory in Iraq and the introduction of the Bush administration's Roadmap for peace, designed to bring about a permanent status agreement by 2005, it is time to re-examine the relevance of Israel's traditional geostrategic assumptions. This paper analyzes the changes in the Arab-Israeli military balance in light of the collapse of the Iraqi military, outlining the conventional and non-conventional threats potentially facing Israel. It assesses the prospects and viability of a conventional attack on the eastern front both in the short run and in the long run. Then, it revisits the concept of secure borders along Israel's eastern front, examining whether Israel's rationale for control of the Valley is consistent with the changes in its strategic environment.

II. DEBATING THE VALLEY'S VALUE

After the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, former IDF commander and Deputy Prime Minister Yigal Allon developed a blueprint for a peace accord that came to be known as the Allon Plan. The document became the pillar of Israel's national security doctrine. The Allon Plan stated that Israel is vulnerable to decisive attack by a coalition of Arab militaries and, therefore, needs strategic depth and natural barriers as main components of its defense doctrine. He recommended that Israel hand over the most densely populated areas in the West Bank and Gaza to Jordan and most of the Sinai to Egypt. Israel, according to the plan, would retain territories vital to its security, and a few areas of religious or sentimental value. Perhaps the most important territory Allon recommended that Israel retain was the Jordan River Valley and the first mountain ridge west of it as natural barrier between Israel and its Arab neighbors to the east.⁸ This entailed a substantial military presence along the border as well as control of the roads leading from Israel's coastal plain through the mountains of the West Bank and into the Jordan River Valley. To strengthen its hold on the Jordan River Valley, Israel built 24 settlements inhabited by more than 6,000 settlers in the 30 years after the 1967 War.

Allon's concept of "secure borders" has been embraced by all of Israel's governments since. Even after the Oslo peace process began, Israel still considered its permanent control over the Valley an irreducible element of any permanent peace agreement. Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said repeatedly that he saw the Jordan River as the defense line of Israel. A month before his assassination, in his October 5, 1995 Knesset address, he said, "The security border of the State of Israel will be located in the Jordan Valley, in the broadest meaning of that term."⁹ He also held that since there would likely be a long lapse of time between the actual signing of the peace treaty, or the diplomatic peace, and the onset of a real peace, a peace that the average man in the street would consider as peace, Israel needed defensible borders during this period. He never defined how long this interregnum would last.

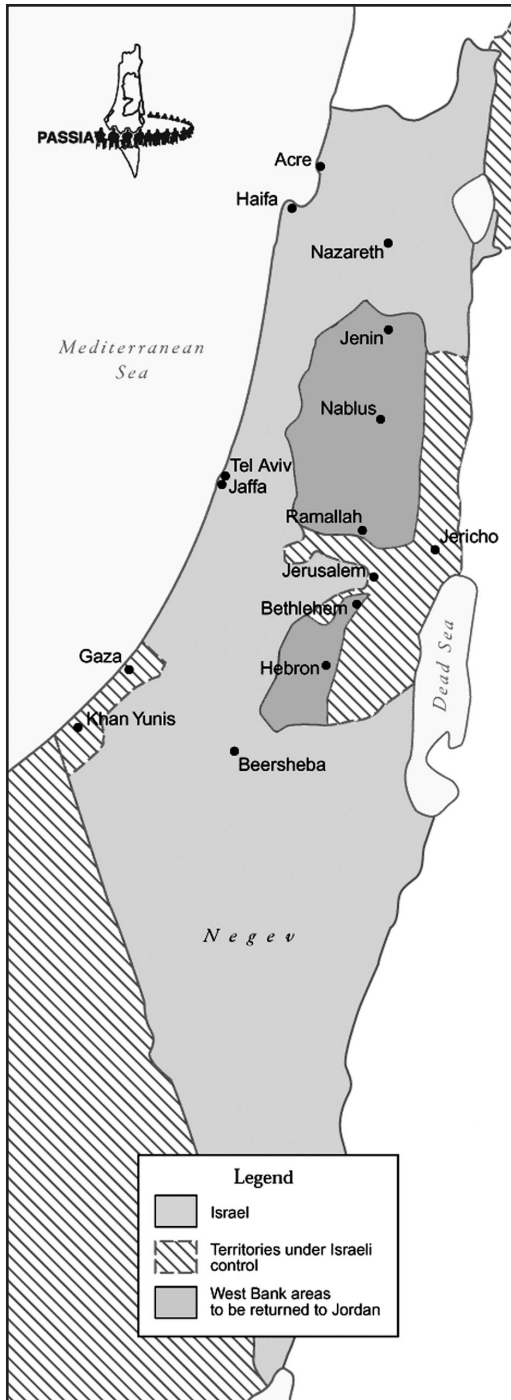
Israeli leaders from the political right have been even more adamant about maintaining Israeli control over the eastern frontier. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu referred to the Jordan Valley as the "gateway to any invasion against Israel."¹⁰ His final status map was dubbed the "Allon-Plus Plan" since it expanded the territory Yigal Allon proposed to retain. According to Netanyahu's proposal, Israel would

8 Yigal Allon, "Israel: The Case for Defensible Borders," *Foreign Affairs* 55, no. 1 (October 1976): 38–53.

9 Dore Gold, "Defensible Borders for Israel," *Jerusalem Viewpoints*, no. 500, (June 15–July 1, 2003).

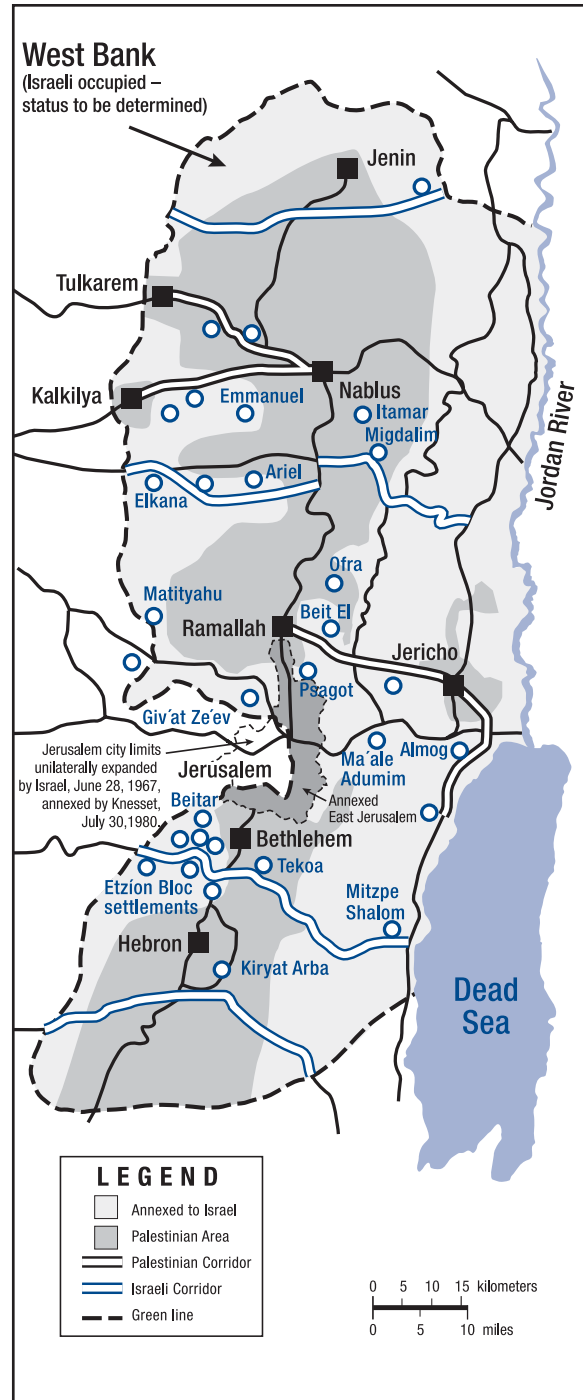
10 Interview on The Christian Broadcasting Network's *The 700 Club* (October 26, 1998).

The Allon Plan, July 1967



Source: Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA)

Netanyahu's "Allon Plus" Final Status Map



Source: Foundation for Middle East Peace

annex the entire Jordan Valley as far west as the Allon Road and a ten-mile wide corridor west of the Dead Sea. Additionally, Israel would control all access to the Jordan River and all border crossings into Jordan.

The progress made in the late 1990s toward Palestinian statehood prompted some leftwing Israelis to question the logic of the Allon Plan and the importance of its version of “defensible borders.” They argued that once a Palestinian state was established in the greater part of the West Bank, an Israeli presence in the Jordan Valley would no longer be an asset and could even be a liability. A 2000 paper by Tel Aviv University’s Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies suggested that the concept of Israeli control in the Jordan Valley was “an anachronism that will only serve to perpetuate the struggle with the Palestinians as well as the Arab-Israeli conflict.”¹¹

One of the main proponents of this view was Israel’s Foreign Minister during the Barak government, Shlomo Ben Ami, who advocated a controversial position: “Our presence in the Jordan River Valley has turned into a myth or a cliché that nobody thinks about twice. The common wisdom is that we need to encircle the Palestinian state with an Israeli security belt. [...] Israel must allow the Palestinian state to function as a normal state with air and seaports and border crossings with its neighbors. Additionally, it should allow it a joint border as long as possible with Jordan in the east and Egypt in the south and find alternative answers to our security challenges.”¹² Ben Ami’s position stemmed from his view that Israel should be interested in the formation of a Jordanian-Palestinian confederacy that would require territorial contiguity between the two countries. According to this view, an Israeli army separating them would be an impediment to peace and stability and self-defeating from Israel’s point of view because maintaining an army outside Israel’s territory is antithetical to its national security doctrine. This view also holds that

Israel’s presence in the Valley would introduce problems in supplying the forces deployed there, which could only be solved by logistical arrangements that would break up Palestinian territorial contiguity.

Ben Ami’s views resonated with then Prime Minister Ehud Barak who was the first Israeli leader to depart from the principles of the Allon Plan. Heading the negotiating team at Camp David in July 2000, Barak was willing to offer far-reaching territorial concessions and hand over the Valley to the Palestinians. He proposed to allow them to control the border crossings with Jordan and Egypt as long as Israel was allowed security observation. During the negotiations, Israel demanded to maintain early warning stations in the mountains overlooking the Jordan Valley with the Palestinians having a liaison presence in those stations. Israel also demanded that the entire air and electromagnetic space over the West Bank, as well as the access roads to the Jordan Valley, be under its control—which thereby impinged upon Palestinian sovereignty. The Palestinians rejected the Israeli proposal. While they were willing to accept an international force or a multi-national force on their borders, they refused to accept any Israeli presence in any form on Palestinian territory.¹³

The December 2000 Clinton Proposal—a last ditch attempt to reach a permanent agreement before the end of the Clinton presidency—again proposed to grant the Palestinians full sovereignty over the Valley. The plan stipulated that after a thirty-six-month period of gradual Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza, IDF units could remain stationed in specific Jordan Valley locations for an additional thirty-six months, and only then under the supervision of an international force. This meant that six years after ratifying the agreement, Israel would have no forces east of the Israel–Palestine border except for three early warning stations. To address Israel’s concerns about the

11 Shlomo Brom, “Security Implications of Establishing a Palestinian State,” Strategic Assessment 3, no. 2, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, August 2000.

12 Shlomo Ben Ami, *A Place for All*, (Tel Aviv: Hakibutz Hameuchad, 1999), 114–115. [Hebrew].

13 Abu Mazen’s speech at the September 9 meeting of the PLO’s Palestinian Central Council <<http://www.nad-plo.org/speeches/abumazen4.html>>.

possibility of a future deterioration in regional security leading to the formation of a new eastern front, the proposal allowed Israel to dispatch forces to the Jordan Valley in the event of an imminent and demonstrable national emergency, and provided criteria to determine what would represent such an emergency.

The Israeli security establishment vehemently opposed the plan on the grounds that it compromised Israel's security. IDF Chief of Staff Shaul Mofaz presented the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee with the position of the general staff, "The Jordan Valley should remain under Israeli sovereignty in its entirety as a buffer zone." He told the committee, "In the event that the Jordan Valley does not remain in Israeli hands following political [negotiations], Israel will have to demand that we have full security control over important [parts of the] Valley and key areas that are important to our defense." Rejecting criticism of military intervention in politics Mofaz said that it was his "duty as chief of staff to point out the discrepancies between Israel's need for security and the plan."¹⁴

With Likud's return to power in February 2001 under Ariel Sharon, the notion of a withdrawal from the Jordan Valley was shelved. Sharon was one of the harshest critics of Barak's policy on the Valley. In July 2000, as leader of the opposition, he maintained that Israel's control over the Valley is one of six red lines for peace.¹⁵ He emphasized that the Valley is not only a buffer zone against an eastern coalition but also a security zone necessary to enable the IDF to cope with the inevitable establishment of a Palestinian state and the terrorist threat emanating from the current zone of Palestinian control. To deal with these threats, Israel began work on a security fence along its boundary with the West Bank separating Jewish and Palestinian population centers in 2002. The original

plan was to erect the fence only along the western end of the West Bank in order to prevent terrorists from infiltrating Israel. But in March 2003 Sharon called for a north-south fence in the Jordan Valley as well, which would run parallel to the border with Jordan, with Israeli settlers towns inside the protected corridor.¹⁶ According to the Israeli newspaper *Yediot Aharonot*, the new fence will stretch about 180 miles from the Gilboa hills overlooking the northern West Bank to the Hebron hills in the south.¹⁷ As of this writing it is not yet clear whether this project will materialize, but its contemplation indicated again that with or without an Iraqi threat from the east, the current government is not ready to relinquish control over its eastern frontier.

Sharon's position resonates with most Israelis. By and large, the Israeli public has viewed the Jordan River Valley as an indispensable strategic asset. During the Oslo years, while demonstrating increasing willingness to cede territories in Judea, Samaria and East Jerusalem, the Israeli public showed little support for territorial concessions in the Valley as part of a permanent status agreement that would lead to the end of conflict. On the eve of the Camp David negotiations, support for return of territories in Samaria climbed up to 51 percent but only 32 percent agreed to similar withdrawals in the Jordan Valley. Since the outbreak of the intifada and the deterioration of the security situation in Israel, Israelis' sense of threat has increased and with it the reluctance to consider withdrawal from the Valley. A 2002 poll showed that while 40 percent of Israelis were willing to withdraw from East Jerusalem only 19 percent accepted such a concession in the Valley.¹⁸ This indicates that Israelis still view the Valley as a crucial component of their security system and while they are willing to consider ceding territory of religious or historical importance they are not willing to make similar concessions when it comes to the security of their borders.

14 *Ha'aretz*, 11 January 2001.

15 Ariel Sharon, "Six Red Lines for Peace," *Jerusalem Post*, 21 July 2000.

16 *International Herald Tribune*, 24 March 2003.

17 *Yediot Aharonot*, 18 March 2003.

18 Asher Arian, "Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2002," Memorandum no. 61, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, July 2002.

Table 1: Support for Territories to be Returned as Part of a Permanent Solution that would Lead to the End of the Conflict¹⁹

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Samaria	30%	30%	38%	44%	39%	41%	51%	39%	31%
E. Jerusalem	10%	9%	12%	20%	17%	21%	24%	51%	40%
Jordan Valley	18%	19%	20%	20%	23%	23%	32%	18%	19%

¹⁹ Ibid.

III. IS THERE AN EASTERN FRONT?

The changes brought about by the end of the Cold War and the 1990–91 Gulf War gradually improved Israel’s strategic position and minimized the likelihood of conventional war along the eastern front. The two most important contributions to this development came with the signing of the 1994 Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty, which made Jordan a de facto barrier against a threat from the east, and the decline of the Iraqi military. Saddam’s crushing defeat in Operation Desert Storm cost Iraq’s military roughly 40 percent of its strength. The strength of Iraq’s tank fleet dropped from 5,500 to 2,200, its towed artillery declined from 3,000 to 2,400 pieces, and its armored personnel carrier strength went from 7,100 to 3,700. Yet the Iraqi military in 1991–2003 still had considerable fighting power including approximately 424,000 active personnel and 650,000 reservists—80 percent of whom were part of the army and the Republican Guard. This force was organized into 23 divisions—17 regular army divisions (six heavy and 11 light), and six Republican Guard Divisions (three heavy and three light)—as well as five commando and two special forces brigades. Iraq had 6,000 surface-to-air missiles and anti-aircraft guns. It also had 350 combat aircraft and 500 helicopters.²⁰ But throughout the 1990s UN sanctions left the Iraqi military in a state of decay and

neglect. Most of its weapons were obsolete, lacking spare parts and proper maintenance, and its forces were poorly trained and led.

This trend did not escape the eyes of Israel’s military planners. A document published by the IDF after the Gulf War concluded that “following the defeat of Iraq, the opening of an eastern military front against us, with the participation of Syria, Jordan and Iraq, seems more distant than ever before.” The document called for review of Israel’s security doctrine adapting it to the new threat environment.²¹ While the prospect of a conventional attack from the east diminished, the Gulf War exposed the “soft underbelly” of the Israeli home front and its vulnerability to missile attacks. Additionally, the increase in the threat of global terrorism, especially after the September 11 terror attacks, and the possibility that terrorist-sponsoring regimes might supply terrorist groups with WMD, changed the perception of the Iraqi threat. It was now seen as less dangerous as a conventional threat, but more dangerous for its WMD capabilities and involvement in terrorism.

This change of perception toward Iraq inspired some structural and doctrinal changes in the IDF including

²⁰ Adapted from *The Military Balance 2002/03* (London: Oxford University Press, 2003); Shlomo Brom and Yiftah Shapir eds., *The Middle East Military Balance 1999–2000*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000); Anthony Cordesman, “If We Fight Iraq: Iraq and The Conventional Military Balance,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, 28 June 2002.

²¹ *Ha’aretz*, 30 April 2003.

a push for development of air- and ground-launched guided weapons intended to improve the attrition rate on the battlefield between Israel and its opponents. Of greatest importance, it forced Israel to divert a great deal of resources from the battlefield to the home front. But at its core, the IDF remained an armed force designed to face the worst-case scenario of a joint attack by an eastern coalition of Syria, Jordan and Iraq.

The IDF fields 163,000 active-duty troops and 425,000 reservists, plus 8,000 paramilitary personnel. Of this, 120,000 active and 400,000 reservists belong to the ground forces, which are organized into 16 divisions—12 of them armored and one air mobile.²² Israel's conventional military forces have always been outnumbered by the collective force of Syria, Jordan and Iraq. In the 1990s, the three Arab armies could deploy 39 ground divisions against Israel's 16. Similarly, a hypothetical Arab coalition could have mustered twice as many tanks and three times as many artillery pieces as the IDF. In the air, the Arab countries also significantly outnumbered Israel: 960 combat aircraft against 624 Israeli planes, and almost three times the number of Israel's helicopters.

If Israel does not have a *quantitative* edge over the Arabs, it has surely maintained and even strengthened its longstanding *qualitative* advantage over its neighbors. This was true in the 1990s when it contemplated an Iraq, Syria, Jordan nightmare alliance, and it is even more true today now that Iraq is out of the picture. The IDF has done a much better job of taking advantage of developments in tactics and technology associated with the revolution in military affairs than have the militaries of the Arab world. Despite budget cuts, Israel's defense spending is still higher than the combined budget of the four countries surrounding it.²³ Arab militaries, especially those of Iraq and Syria, suffer from chronic problems of poor maintenance, leadership, and training, and the IDF enjoys a significant technological edge over its opponents, enabling it

superior control over its troops and great accuracy in its weapons systems.

More than half of the IDF's main battle tanks are high quality *Merkava* and upgraded M-60s, but only a third of the Arab tanks were (and are) relatively high quality tanks like the T-72. The rest were low grade T-54s, T-55s and T-62s. Similarly, Israel's inferiority in the number of artillery pieces is compensated by the fact that almost half of Israel's artillery is self-propelled while on the Arab side most of the artillery pieces—almost 80 percent—are towed guns and howitzers. In addition, Israel enjoys a major superiority in the quality and lethality of its tank and artillery ammunition. It also has logistics and engineering equipment, as well as command and control capabilities, far superior to those of the Arab states. In the air, Israel's air force completely outclassed that of any of its neighbors, or all of them combined—and still does. The Israeli Air Force owns 340 advanced multi-role F-15's and F-16's as well as 135 first-rate attack helicopters such as the AH-64A Apache and AH-1G/1S Cobra. In comparison, the airpower of the Syrian and Iraqi air forces was based mainly on 1980 models of the MiG-25, MiG-29 and MiG-23 as well as the Su-24 and the Mirage F-1B. None of these were comparable in performance to Israel's aircraft. Jordan was the only one of the three to have first-grade multi-role aircraft, having received fewer than 20 F-16's and 22 Cobra helicopters during the 1990s.

Operation Iraqi Freedom brought about the demise of the Iraqi armed forces, at least as an expeditionary army, for the foreseeable future. Saddam's military suffered heavy losses and a large portion of its equipment was destroyed by the coalition. After the war, the United States disbanded the remains of the Army and has begun to slowly build a new one under its own auspices. Iraq's intelligence and security organizations were similarly purged or dismantled. The war also removed the threat of Iraq's employment of WMD.

22 Adapted from Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, *The Middle East Strategic Balance 2002–2003*, <<http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss/balance/Israel.pdf>> and Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Arab Israeli Military Balance in 2002*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, February 2002.

23 *Ha'aretz*, 24 October 2003.

Table 2: The Eastern Front Military Balance Before March 2003²⁴

	Israel	Syria	Jordan	Iraq	Total Arab
Regular personnel + reserves	631,000	921,000	133,000	1,074,000	2,128,000
Army divisions	16	12	4	23	39
Tanks	3,895	3,700	870	2,200	6,770
Artillery	1,950	2,575	780	2,400	5,755
APC/AFV	8,040	4,080	1,475	3,700	9,255
Combat aircraft	624	520	90	350	960
Helicopters	300	300	65	500	865

With Iraq unable to take part in an Arab coalition, Israel's military balance with the Arabs improved dramatically and the threat of a classic war along Israel's eastern front has been virtually nullified, at least for the short-term.

The prospects of a Syrian-Iraqi coalition or an invasion of Iraqi forces into Jordan seem highly remote. Without Iraq, Israel can offset the Arabs' quantitative advantage while maintaining its qualitative edge. The IDF's ground forces account for 16 divisions, the exact number of divisions Jordan and Syria own jointly. The size of the Israeli air force is also similar to that of Syria and Jordan combined. Thus with Iraq gone, the quantitative imbalance has been rectified, while

Israel's massive qualitative edge at least remains, and arguably has increased further.

It is not only sheer inferiority in force that makes an Arab attack on Israel in the foreseeable future highly unlikely, but also the new political climate pervading the Middle East in the aftermath of the Iraq war. The U.S. military presence along the Syrian border, America's close relations with both Jordan and Israel, and its renewed commitment to promote an Israeli-Palestinian peace, all act as tension reducing measures that counter any inclination for countries in the region to resort to the use of force. All of this reduces the likelihood of an eastern front to an all time low.

Table 3: The Decline of the Eastern Front²⁵

	Israel	Eastern front with Iraq	Eastern front without Iraq
Regular personnel + reserves	631,000	2,128,000	1,054,000
Army divisions	16	39	16
Tanks	3,895	6,770	4,570
Artillery	1,950	5,755	3,355
APC/AFV	8,040	9,255	5,555
Combat aircraft	624	960	610
Helicopters	300	865	365

²⁴ Adapted from Brom and Shapir, *Middle East Military Balance*.

²⁵ Ibid.

IV. LONG-TERM CONCERNS

Clearly, with the threat of an eastern front removed, Israel's claim to the Jordan Valley has less credence than it once did. But what about the long run? Can Israel simply dismiss the possibility that a new eastern front might reemerge? Under what conditions could a new threat from the east coalesce? The destabilization or radicalization of Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia or any of the other ring states, or a general decline in the economic conditions in the region could bring about deterioration in Arab-Israeli relations and with it an array of new threats.

REEMERGENCE OF AN IRAQI THREAT

While it is certain that at present the Iraqi army such as it is does not constitute any threat to Israel, especially with U.S. forces present in Iraq, it is not yet clear what will be the shape of the military of post-Saddam Iraq. Nor can we determine at this point what will be the nature of the Iraqi regime, its attitude toward Israel, its threat perception and the availability of resources for arms procurement. As of this writing it is also unclear what happened to Saddam's arsenal of WMD.

Can Iraq reemerge as a threat? In the short term this is highly unlikely because its military needs will be minimal. The U.S. troop presence in the next several years

will be large and prolonged and should be sufficient to counter challenges to Iraq's territorial integrity, ensure regional stability, and spare Iraq the need for a large army. In the interim, the United States will assist in building an apolitical, professional military force working in sync with a broad-based, representative government.²⁶ If this government is pro-American, it is likely to pose a minimal threat to Israel.

It is also unclear how strongly Iraq would continue to pursue an anti-Israel line. As long as tension exists between Israel, Syria and Lebanon, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains unresolved, it is unlikely that Iraq would adopt a position that deviates from that of mainstream Arab countries. That said, with U.S. influence it is likely that Iraq might adopt a more moderate approach toward Israel than that of the former Ba'ath regime.

In the long run, the Iraqi army is likely to undergo a transformation similar to that which Egypt underwent after it moved from Soviet to American allegiance in 1978 and eventually emerged as a force superior (at least in its weapons and doctrine) to that of Saddam's. Assuming positive U.S.-Iraqi relations, the United States is likely to supply the Iraqi military with weapons and technology similar to that of the

²⁶ Michael Eisenstadt and Kenneth Pollack, "Envisioning a Post-Saddam Military," PolicyWatch no. 681, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 25 November 2002.

Egyptian and Saudi armies, including first-rate fighter planes, attack helicopters, tanks, anti-tank missiles, rocket systems, radar systems and command and control and surveillance equipment. The process of modernization in the Iraqi military will not only involve acquisition of state-of-the-art weapons but also the adoption of Western doctrine.

Israel's main concern is that following years of modernization of the Iraqi military, a regime hostile to the West and to Israel would then take power. This could happen either through an Islamic revolution spear-headed by Shi'ite clerics or by nationalist groups. Such a development would be a major setback to regional security especially since such a regime is likely to strive for regional hegemony and renew Iraq's pursuit of WMD. A radical regime in Baghdad could pose a threat to Jordan, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, and especially to Israel. It would revive the threat of an eastern front.

On the other hand, signs of democratization and political progress in Iraq reflecting a shift in the country's priorities and a genuine attempt to achieve domestic stability rather than regional hegemony could alleviate Israel's concerns, instill a stronger sense of security among Israelis and increase their readiness to make concessions for peace.

A CLASH WITH SYRIA

Of all of the Arab confrontation states, Syria is the one most likely to spark a military confrontation with Israel. Syria's support for terrorist organizations such as Hizballah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad and other Palestinian groups; its continued development of WMD; and its large conventional military are still considered potential threats to Israel.

Syria and Israel have roughly the same number of ground forces formations. While Israel has 12 armored divisions, four mechanized divisions and 12 independent brigades, Syria's ground forces include seven armored divisions, three mechanized divisions, two special forces divisions and 22 independent brigades. With approximately 3,700 tanks, 2,500 artillery pieces, and 4,000 armored personnel carriers of various types, Syria has a slight quantitative advantage over Israel. Syria also maintains an advantage in tactical surface-to-surface missiles which could give it an advantage in the early phases of combat. Syria procured Scud-C surface-to-surface missiles from North Korea and is currently working with Iran and North Korea to upgrade them. These missiles have a range that covers most of Israel's territory and can carry chemical or biological warheads.²⁷

As mentioned before, although the Syrian military is large in numbers, the quality of its forces and weapons does not approach that of Israel. The Syrian army suffers from acute problems with aging equipment. It has not introduced a new weapons system in 13 years and, due to an \$11 billion debt to Russia, Syria lacks spare parts for its Soviet made equipment.²⁸ Poor maintenance, training, and leadership also reduce the effectiveness of Syria's ground forces.²⁹ In the air, Syria's situation is even worse. Israel's offensive capability, based on its fleet of state of the art aircraft like the F-15I and F-16 C/D, its infrastructure and its command and control system far surpass Syria's air force.³⁰ All of this led Shaul Mofaz, when he was still chief of staff in Sharon's previous government, to conclude that in a war Israel would vanquish Syria in no more than a week or two.³¹

The Syrians realize their military inferiority and are consequently reluctant to provoke Israel. Further-

27 *Middle East Strategic Balance 2002–2003*.

28 *Ma'ariv*, 10 October 2003.

29 Brom and Shapir, *Middle East Military Balance*, 40–41; Eyal Ziser, "The Syrian Army: Between the Domestic and the External Fronts," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 5, no. 1 (March 2001), <<http://www.biu.ac.il/SOC/besa/meria/journal/2001/issue1/jv5n1a1.html>>.

30 Brom and Shapir, *Middle East Military Balance*, 63.

31 *Ha'aretz*, 17 October 2003.

more, America's victory in Iraq worsened Syria's strategic position, leaving it surrounded by pro-American countries (Israel, Jordan, Iraq, and NATO-ally Turkey). Syria's relations with the United States have deteriorated as a result of Syria's support for Saddam Hussein's regime before and during the war.

One would expect that with such a poor strategic position Syria would decide to mend its international ways and even reengage in a peace dialogue with Israel that could reduce even further the potential of military confrontation. But Syria's diplomatic calculus is often unpredictable thanks to the adventurism, lack of experience and miscalculation of its president, Bashar al-Asad, and these same traits could inadvertently trigger a military clash with the IDF. If Syria fails to engage Israel diplomatically while maintaining its support for Hizballah and its Palestinian sisters, it is likely to provoke an Israeli military response in Lebanon sooner or later that might spill over the Israel-Syria border.

In the past three years Israel has used force against Syria in response to Syria's support of terrorist organization no fewer than four times. On April 17, 2001, following a Hizballah attack that left one soldier dead, Israeli warplanes blasted a Syrian radar station in Lebanon, killing four Syrian soldiers. Later, on July 1, 2001, also following Hizballah attacks, the Israeli air force hit another Syrian radar station. In August 2003 Israeli warplanes flew over Asad's palace in Damascus and in October 2003, Israeli warplanes attacked an Islamic Jihad training camp near Damascus, in retaliation for the organization's suicide bombing that killed 21 people in Israel. The last two attacks left no doubt of Israel's capability to penetrate Syrian air defenses with impunity. Though in all of the above cases Syria's response was restrained, a country like Syria cannot afford to be humiliated so often.

A war with Syria, therefore, should be regarded as more than a theoretical possibility. Syria may not initiate a full-scale conventional assault on Israel, but it could create a spiraling war of escalation. For instance, Damascus might order its Hizballah proxies

in Lebanon to fire long-range rockets at Israel to try to drag the IDF back into large-scale military operations in Lebanon. It might simply allow Hizballah to do this either to retaliate for some Israeli move, or as a way of turning up the pressure on Israel to make concessions over the Golan. If Israel were to retaliate against Hizballah, Syria might attempt to use force against Israel under the pretext of fighting on behalf of the Lebanese. Alternatively, Bashar's precarious government might feel it necessary to retaliate directly against Israel for fear of being shown as weaker than his father in "standing up" to Israel. As part of these operations, Syria might opt to launch missiles against Israel proper to try to disrupt IDF mobilization and deployment, or even seize Israeli military outposts or settlements in the Golan Heights. In the absence of progress in the Israeli-Palestinian track, it is almost certain that both the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and those in Lebanon would assist the Syrians and the Lebanese by intensifying their military operations against Israel with the intention of disrupting IDF mobilization and logistical efforts.

It would be hard for a war between Israel and Syria to avoid dragging in other countries such as Iran and perhaps even Libya. These allies would likely assist Syria by sending weapons, ammunition and spare parts, but it is unlikely that any would contribute combat forces. It is also very unlikely that Jordan would allow Syrian forces to use its territory to attack Israel from the Jordan Valley. Hence the likelihood of a true "eastern front" materializing in support of a Syrian-led effort is low, and consequently, giving up control over the Jordan River Valley would not jeopardize Israel's ability to handle even such a scenario.

V. JORDAN AND THE PALESTINIANS

The Arab world has traditionally viewed Jordan as the ideal platform for an invasion of Israel. But since the 1948 War Jordan has always been reluctant to fulfill this role. With the exception of the 1967 War in which King Hussein was misled into joining the fray, Jordan preferred to keep a low profile and not volunteer its territory as a gateway to Israel. Instead, Jordan has done a great deal to prevent cross-border infiltration by Palestinian groups attempting to draw it into armed conflict with Israel. Jordan also drifted away from the uncompromising wing of the Arab world represented by its neighbors Syria and Iraq, signing a peace treaty with Israel in 1994.

Jordan's leader King Abdullah has already proven to be a strong, yet moderate, leader with sharp political instincts and an ability to balance Jordan's Arab identity with a pro-Western standing. He has also taken important steps to extricate Jordan from its economic crisis and maintain tight control over Islamist opposition groups. Furthermore, the king realizes the strategic importance of preserving the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty and the strategic relations with Washington despite sharp disagreements with some U.S. and Israeli policies in the region. In 2003, although he publicly rejected the idea of an American attack on Iraq, the king ended up playing an important role in the coalition success, allowing U.S. forces to deploy and launch operations from

his territory. His policy toward Israel has also been moderate. Even during the toughest days of the second intifada, with public rage peaking, King Abdullah insisted on preserving Jordan's diplomatic relations with Israel, although he did postpone sending a new ambassador to Tel Aviv in protest of Israeli military action in the West Bank and Gaza.

This suggests that as long as the Hashemites are in power, Jordan's alignment with the United States and Israel is likely to ensure that the peace holds. It is also likely that Jordan will not allow foreign forces to use its territory or airspace as a launching pad for attacks against Israel.

In the longer run, unfortunately, Jordan's future continues to be very much in doubt because of its problematic location, its demography, its struggling economy, its scarce water and natural resources, and its Muslim fundamentalist opposition. All these could be seeds of potential instability. Time and again it has been suggested that Jordan's demise is imminent and that the growing size of its Palestinian population—around 60 percent of Jordanians are of Palestinian origin—will ultimately challenge the legitimacy of the monarchy. Furthermore, despite the fact that the Jordanian military is the most professional and respected military in the Arab world, its small size may not be sufficient to meet Jordan's internal and external security challenges.

Jordan has already welcomed two influxes of Palestinians—one in 1948 after the creation of Israel, and the other in June 1967 after the Six Day War, totaling 1.7 million refugees. In fact, more than one-third of the world's Palestinian population resides in Jordan. Though most of the Palestinians living in Jordan are Jordanian citizens, many are refugees from past Arab-Israeli wars who insist on maintaining their refugee status to ensure their eligibility for a "right of return" or financial compensation in the event of a final status accord. The demographic balance tipped even further in favor of the Palestinians since the outbreak of hostilities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip three and a half years ago. Anywhere from 80,00 to 200,000 West Bank Palestinians have spilled over Jordan's border since the beginning of the second intifada, and thousands more are camped near the Allenby Bridge trying to get in to Jordan.³² The flow of Palestinian refugees could pose a political threat to the Hashemite Kingdom and worsen its economic situation. In Jordan, poverty affects a third of the people and the unemployment rate is at least 14 percent according to government figures. Some independent economists put the figure at closer to 20 percent.³³

To ensure its survival, Jordan will continue to depend on political, military and economic ties with the United States. But Jordan's future is directly connected to the developments in the Israeli-Palestinian front. Progress toward a permanent status peace agreement will surely improve Jordan-Israel relations but an escalation of the intifada could lead to the exact opposite. Jordan is at the heart of the Palestinian question and its population feels great affinity to the Palestinians west of the Jordan River. Harsh Israeli retaliation against the Palestinians in the event of a major terror

attack could unleash public rage and cause internal unrest and pressure on the Jordanian regime to sever its ties with Israel. This could lead to armed clashes between the Jordanian security forces and the Palestinian population which could, in turn, lead to destabilization of the regime. Though Jordanian security forces are known to be loyal and ruthlessly effective, Palestinian demonstrators could still attempt to seize arms depots and military bases and take over government installations.

The reaction of Palestinians in Jordan could be further exacerbated if they sense that Israel is trying to conduct mass expulsions of Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza into Jordan in an effort to create a Palestinian state in Jordan. Many Jordanians suffer from anxieties over previous statements by Israeli leaders, primarily from the right wing, that the Palestinian state should be established in Jordan.³⁴ The Jordanian concern stems from the fact that for years the main proponent of this idea was none other than Sharon himself. Even though he publicly abandoned the notion that Jordan is Palestine in April 2001, Sharon's old views are still a source of deep-rooted fear among many on both sides of the river.³⁵

For both Israel and Jordan, the creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip holds opportunity as well as danger. It could enable closer social and economic relations between the Jordanian and Palestinian communities and a better climate for investment and economic development to the benefit of both. The Palestinians have never hidden their desire to see some sort of unification between Palestinians in Jordan and their co-patriots in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Over the years

32 *Jerusalem Post*, 26 April 2002; *Yediot Ahronot*, 7 November 2003.

33 *Business Week*, 23 September 2002.

34 Asher Susser, *Jordan: A Case Study of a Pivotal State*, (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000).

35 *Ha'aretz*, 4 November 2001. In 1981 and on several previous occasions, Ariel Sharon expressed his opinion about a Palestinian State as follows, "I believe that the starting point for a solution is to establish a Palestinian state in that part of Palestine that was separated from what was to become Israel in 1922 and which is now Jordan. [...] The only strangers are the members of the Hashemite Kingdom ruled by King Hussein. [...] I don't mind who takes over Jordan." *Time Magazine*, October 5, 1981. Later, in 1982, in an interview with Oriana Fallaci, Sharon was quoted as saying, "But they get a homeland. It is the Palestine that is called Jordan, yet Transjordan. Listen, this Palestinian thing has puzzled me for 12 years, and the more I think of it the more I decide that Jordan...is the only solution." *Washington Post*, 29 August 1982.

Palestinian leaders have often floated the prospect of a confederation with Jordan. Just days after King Hussein passed away, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat revived the debate over political association between Jordan and the future Palestinian state by announcing that the Palestinian National Council had agreed to a confederation with Jordan and that the Palestinians were ready to create such a confederacy even before they had achieved statehood.

For their part, Jordanian officials have made it clear that, for the time being, Jordan is not interested in a confederacy, at least until the Palestinians establish their own state on their own soil.³⁶ Of course, their views do not necessarily represent the will of the Jordanian street. Public opinion polls show that both Palestinians and Jordanians believe that the two peoples share special social and historic ties and they wish to see cross-border relations develop into a wider and deeper cooperation in the political, economic, social, and educational realms. A 1997 poll on Jordanian-Palestinian relations found that 84 percent of Jordanians and 70 percent of Palestinians supported some form of unity, such as total union or a confederation between the two peoples.³⁷

Such a union, if done under proper circumstances and assuming that the confederation is formed with Jordanian consent and supports the various security arrangements with Jerusalem, could be welcomed in Israel. However, a Jordanian-Palestinian entity might not necessarily arise from mutual consent; instead it might come about as a result of Palestinian irredentism. The territory allocated to the Palestinian state will probably extend over only a limited part of historical Palestine, hardly fulfilling Palestinian national aspirations. Irredentist aspirations to expand the borders of a future Palestinian state either at Israel's or at Jordan's expense could persist among various

Palestinian sectors and could eventually become a driving force in Palestinian politics. Undoubtedly the opponents of the peace process, headed by Hamas and Islamic Jihad, will push this agenda and will likely advocate an effort to undermine Israel from within. However, other Palestinian nationalists might recognize a potentially more viable course of action in attempting to use Jordan's demography to threaten, and ultimately, take over the Hashemite Kingdom. This was attempted before. In 1970, the PLO tried to destabilize Jordan and take over the country, an attempt that led King Hussein to evict the bulk of the armed Palestinians from the Kingdom in what came to be known as "Black September."

Today, such scenarios seem remote. But if a future Israeli-Palestinian-Jordanian peace agreement should fail to address the chronic problems of both Palestinians and Jordanians, over the long run it could create pervasive discontent and an atmosphere conducive to radicalism, strengthening the irredentist sentiment among Palestinians and Jordanians alike.

Israel's acceptance of a Palestinian state must therefore be conditioned on the creation of a regional framework that would ensure the survival of the Hashemite Kingdom. A Palestinian takeover in Jordan resulting in an expanded Palestinian state on both sides of the Jordan River Valley would be, in the words of Israeli defense analyst Ze'ev Schiff, "a strategic nightmare for Israel and a destabilizing earthquake, liable to rattle the entire region. If Palestinians were to rule Amman that would mark the establishment of a single, large Palestinian state stretching from Iraq to Israel's coastal plain."³⁸ By usurping the state of Jordan, the Palestinians would be able to acquire the heavy weapons of the Jordanian military, including hundreds of tanks, artillery pieces, and an air force. Such an arsenal in the hands of the Palestinians would

36 *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 18–24 February 1999.

37 The Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR), "Joint Palestinian-Jordanian Poll on Jordanian-Palestinian Relations," 22–30, December 1997, <<http://www.pcpsr.org/survey/cprspolls/jointpoll/joint1a.html>>.

38 Ze'ev Schiff, *Israeli Preconditions for Palestinian Statehood*, Research Memorandum 39, (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1999), 13.

violate a key Israeli red line prohibiting the Palestinian state from building a heavy army and air power capability. Moreover, Palestinian control of both banks of the Jordan River would allow them to deploy heavy weapons and long-range artillery in the West Bank and pose a threat to Israeli population centers. A Palestinian air force and air-defense system might even be able to deny Israel control over the airspace west of the Jordan River.

The fear that Jordan might someday be taken over by the Palestinians and joined with the Palestinian state on the West Bank is an important motive for many Israelis to retain control of the Valley. This concern is also shared by many Jordanians. Though they refrain from saying it publicly, some Jordanian decision-makers like King Abdullah's uncle and former crown prince, Hassan bin Talal, who is considered a proponent of having a buffer between Jordan and Palestine, have expressed unease at the idea of having a Palestinian state that shares a common border with Jordan. Privately they have indicated a preference for an Israeli presence in the Jordan Valley to serve as a barrier between Jordan and Palestine. Others, like Jordanian Foreign Minister Marwan Muasher, and reportedly the King, believe that under the new conditions in the region a thriving, secular Palestinian entity on the border of Jordan would serve Jordan's interests much better than a fragile, aggressive and fundamentalist enclave under Israeli control.³⁹

This Jordanian ambiguity on the future of the Valley makes it hard for the United States to craft a policy that can address the security interests of Israel, Jordan and the Palestinians. Without an unambiguous sign from Amman that it wants a joint border with a new Palestine, it is likely that the Israeli right's claim that a continued IDF presence in the Valley is a guarantor of Jordanian stability will continue to resonate in Washington.

³⁹ *Ha'aretz*, 3 June 2003.

VI. HOW IMPORTANT IS THE JORDAN VALLEY FOR ISRAEL'S SECURITY?

In the wake of the second intifada and September 11 it has become apparent that terrorism is probably the greatest threat that Israel will face in the next several years, with weapons of mass destruction in second place, and a conventional assault by Arab armies a very distant third. If the threats of terror and WMD loom largest in Israel's defense thinking, and conventional attack has diminished markedly, then Israelis need to present a persuasive case why permanent control of the Jordan Valley is necessary for Israel's security—and how control of this territory can help the country confront its greatest threats.

This is not going to be an easy sell. Clearly, Israel's loss of control of the bridges would deny it the ability to monitor unwanted individuals trying to enter from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. But with the establishment of a Palestinian state, even if Israel insists on remaining in the Valley, Israel will lose this ability. The Palestinian state will surely have air and seaports that will allow it free movement of goods and individuals in and out of the country. Israel's control of the bridges will therefore not be able to guarantee that terrorists are kept east of the Jordan River Valley. In fact, even today, when Israel has full control of the bridges and borders, terrorists do succeed in entering its territory.

With regard to the threat of ballistic missiles and WMD, control over the Valley adds little to Israel's

ability to safeguard its populace and territory from attack, as the 1991 Iraqi missile attacks showed. Chemical, biological and even nuclear materials could be smuggled into the Palestinian state via air or sea or hidden in trucks coming through Jordan or Egypt. The WMD threat can really only be addressed through a combination of an intrusive multilateral arms control regime and sophisticated over-the-horizon capabilities including high precision weapons, long-range reconnaissance capabilities, advanced command and control systems and the deployment of a robust national missile defense system.

Overall, control over the Jordan River has only a minimal dampening effect on the threats of terrorism and WMD attack. The Valley's only real strategic value for Israel is against the reemergence of an Arab eastern front, or a major destabilization of the region as a result of regime change in Jordan. As discussed above, these contingencies are unlikely in the short run but cannot be excluded in the more distant future. Reconstitution of Iraq's military capability and its hostility to Israel coupled with the potential destabilization of Jordan cannot be considered remote possibilities in the decade or so following the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Furthermore, a key unknown for Israel is whether the Palestinians will abandon their irredentist claims once their national aspirations have been fulfilled. More

important for the determination of whether Israel can afford to give up the Jordan Valley will be the nature of its strategic environment at the time Israeli-Palestinian negotiations over the Valley take place. This environment will be shaped by the socio-economic and political changes in the Arab confrontation states and the Middle East at large, as well as by the success or failure of the United States to impose a new regional order in the Middle East in coming years. Time will tell whether the region makes strides toward stability, democracy and modernization or whether it slides into further strife, poverty and political instability. The former would doubtless make it easier for Israelis to agree to part with the Valley; the latter would make it very unlikely they would be willing to do so. Without such clarity it would be premature for any Israeli to assume that the conventional threat of an eastern front has disappeared altogether.

Until these issues are clarified, any permanent status agreement between Israel and the Palestinians will have to address Israel's security concerns, devising some mechanism that would allow Israel to deploy forces in the Jordan Valley in the event of an imminent threat from the east (as in the Clinton "parameters") as well as providing guarantees for the survival of the Jordanian monarchy. Indeed, the physical control of the territory of the Jordan Valley is not as essential to Israel's security as is the political well-being of Jordan itself. Israel needs a security system which guarantees that Jordanian soil would never be used for a ground or aerial attack against Israel. The only way of ensuring this is by strengthening the Hashemite regime militarily, politically, and economically.

Israel's policy toward both Jordan and the Palestinians are crucial pieces of this effort. It should help reduce tension in Jordan by alleviating some of the anger and frustration among the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, as well as those in Jordan. Israel should strive to improve the Palestinians' quality of life, allow free movement of people and goods between the two sides of the river, improve the overall economic situation in the territories and reengage in joint economic projects with Jordan.

The United States also has a major role to play in securing the Hashemite regime by providing economic and military assistance to the struggling nation. Since its blunder in 1990, when King Hussein refused to join the international coalition against Iraq, Jordan has proved to be a valuable and loyal ally of the United States. During the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Jordan proved its loyalty again by allowing U.S. forces to operate against Iraq from bases in eastern Jordan. Strong American support and generous economic assistance for the Hashemite regime would not only strengthen Jordan but also instill a sense of security in Israel—and with it, an increased willingness to make territorial concessions.

VII. SECURITY MECHANISMS FOR PERMANENT STATUS AGREEMENT

Unfortunately, even with all of the above efforts one cannot guarantee the long term survival of the Hashemite regime, and therefore any final status agreement should provide for a test period of at least a decade following its signing before a complete hand-over of the Valley takes place. Following this test period, assuming Israel's strategic environment has continued to improve, Israel should consider permanent withdrawal from the Valley. But Israel's insistence on a continued presence in the Valley should not be a show-stopper. In the interim period, Israel and the Palestinians can agree on certain security arrangements regarding the future of the Valley that would address Israel's security concerns without infringing on Palestinian sovereignty there.

LEASING

The Palestinians can agree to lease specific areas in the Valley in which a limited Israeli military presence and training would be permitted on a temporary basis. This is not an uncommon arrangement. Witness the American leased bases in Panama, British leased bases in Egypt, and the Soviet leasing of Finland's Hanko peninsula for 30 years in 1947. The Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty provided another precedent for such an arrangement. The agreement allowed an Israeli presence in Jordanian territory in the Naharayim and Zofar areas for 25 years, mainly for private land use. Just as in these cases, the arrangements with the

Palestinians could be renewed automatically for the same period of time unless a one-year prior notice of termination was given by either party. Such an agreement could also establish the maximum size of military presence, the exact locations where Israeli military activity could take place, and other conditions for use of the territory while preserving the principle that the land does "belong" to the Palestinians and will eventually revert to their full control.

As long as Palestinian principles are respected, and unless the Palestinian leadership intended to repatriate large numbers of Palestinian refugees in the Valley, leasing the area should not be a terribly bitter pill for them to swallow. With the exception of Jericho, which is already under Palestinian control, the Palestinian population in the Valley is sparse and a continuing Israeli military presence there should not interfere with their lives for many years. The Valley has no natural resources or agricultural land and its value to the Palestinian economy is minimal. In fact, leasing the area to Israel could provide the nascent Palestinian economy with an important source of reliable income.

INTERNATIONAL FORCES

For the most part, Israel has objected to foreign forces taking responsibility for its security. But the experience of the Multinational Force in Sinai, which was created in 1979 by Egypt, Israel and the United States

after the signing of the Camp David peace accord, has shown that international forces can be effective when their mandate is carefully determined. There are a number of tasks international forces could fulfill if called on to fully or partially replace the IDF presence in the Valley. International forces could assist in staffing, supplying, maintaining and operating sophisticated electronic warning stations and border crossings. Such a force could also send monitoring teams to regularly inspect and verify the implementation of the agreement. They could also monitor the movements of goods across the Jordan River bridges to try to prevent weapons and terrorists from gaining access to Israel.

However, it is important to remain aware of the limitations of such forces. International forces would not be able to address any of the core concerns that make up the real basis for Israel's continued presence in the Valley. They would not be able to defend Israel's borders if a new Arab coalition were to mount an attack on Israel from the east. Nor would they be able to intervene on behalf of the Hashemite regime if it were seriously challenged. International troops would also be unable to guarantee the reintroduction of Israeli forces along the main routes leading from Israel to the Jordan Valley if the Palestinians decided to try to block such a deployment. In sum, international forces may be useful for monitoring a peaceful environment, but their effectiveness in addressing the major challenges of a volatile environment is highly questionable.

ELECTRONIC INTELLIGENCE SYSTEMS

To a limited extent, Israel's military presence in the Valley could be replaced by electronic intelligence systems. Such surveillance equipment could be located both in the mountain range overlooking the Valley as well as in the vicinity of the bridges. Aerial surveillance might also supplement or complement such ground stations. However, as in the case of international monitors, this solution cannot address the scenarios of political instability presented above. Consequently,

even the most sophisticated intelligence system could not substitute for actual presence of IDF units on the ground. Without such a presence Israel would have to move forces into the Valley, probably early on when the political situation would be open to multiple interpretations, and would invariably face resistance by Palestinian forces.

VIII. CONCLUSION

If and when progress toward a permanent agreement resumes between Palestinians and Israelis, Israel would surely be expected to adopt a more lenient stance than that presented so far by Sharon's government regarding the future deployment of the IDF in the Jordan Valley. If it is unwilling to show some give, any Israeli government will have to articulate a new rationale for the need to continue to control this territory. Adherence to the old mantra that the Valley is a buffer against an eastern front is not likely to resonate even with many of Israel's friends in the United States given the radically altered nature of Israel's threat environment. Israel's legitimate concern about the future of Jordanian-Palestinian relations, and its desire to be in a position to ensure the stability of the Hashemite Kingdom could carry more weight. But to legitimize the Valley's role as a buffer between Jordan and the West Bank, Israel will have to make a strong case why destabilization of Jordan is likely in the future, why such an eventuality could significantly undermine Israel's security, and how Israel would use its position in the Valley to prevent such an outcome. (One would have to ask whether an IDF incursion into Jordan to save the monarchy from its own Palestinian population would, in the end, really help the Hashemites). Furthermore, such a claim would only be accepted if Jordan itself supports it, at least in private.

Without full control of the Valley it will be increasingly difficult for Israel to shift the battlefield of any future war into neighboring territory and achieve the rapid victory upon which its national security strategy is predicated. With no heavy forces near the bridges, Israel will have to rely mostly on air power to prevent enemy forces from moving west of the Jordan River. Israel will need to develop a much more robust strategic branch capable of using long-range weapons to deal with over-the-horizon threats. Currently, Israel's strategic forces are primarily designed for deterrence and defensive purposes. But without control of the Valley, Israel will have to significantly increase its arsenal of high-precision conventional surface-to-surface missiles capable of hitting distant enemy targets at great accuracy. In other words, because Israel's borders will no longer be based on fully defensible terrain, the IDF will have to increase its ability to strike at distant threats long before they actually approach Israel's borders. This is not an insurmountable task—especially given how limited the conventional threats posed by the Arab states currently are—but it will be a major doctrinal shift requiring a comprehensive reorganization of Israel's force structure. As mentioned at the outset, such a doctrinal shift can come only in the framework of a clear national defense strategy and require a fresh assessment of the meaning of defensible borders once a Palestinian state is formed.

The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and should not be construed as representing those of the Institute for the Analysis of Global Security, its Board of Directors or its Board of Advisors.

THE SABAN CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST POLICY

The Saban Center for Middle East Policy was established on May 13th, 2002 with an Inaugural Address by His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan. The establishment of the Saban Center reflects the Brookings Institution's commitment to expand dramatically its research and analysis of Middle East policy issues at a time when the region has come to dominate the U.S. foreign policy agenda.

The Saban Center's purpose is to provide Washington policymakers with balanced, objective, in-depth and timely research and policy analysis from experienced and knowledgeable people who can bring fresh perspectives to bear on the critical problems of the Middle East. The Center upholds the Brookings tradition of being open to a broad range of views. Its central objective is to advance understanding of developments in the Middle East through policy-relevant scholarship and debate.

The Center's establishment has been made possible by a generous founding grant from Mr. Haim Saban of Los Angeles. Ambassador Martin S. Indyk, Senior Fellow in Foreign Policy Studies, is the Director of the Saban Center. Dr. Kenneth M. Pollack is the Center's Director of Research. Joining Ambassador Indyk and Dr. Pollack in the work of the Center is a core group of Middle East experts, who conduct original research and develop innovative programs to promote a better understanding of the policy choices facing American decision makers in the Middle East. They include Dr. Tamara Wittes who is a specialist on political reform in the Arab world. Professor Shibley Telhami who holds the Sadat Chair at the University of Maryland; Professor Shaul Bakhash an expert on Iranian politics

from George Mason University; Professor Daniel Byman from Georgetown University, a Middle East terrorism expert; Dr. Flynt Leverett a former senior CIA analyst and Senior Director at the National Security Council who is a specialist on Syria and Lebanon; and Dr. Philip Gordon, a Senior Fellow in Foreign Policy Studies at Brookings who specializes in Europe's and Turkey's relations with the Middle East. The Center is located in the Foreign Policy Studies Program at Brookings, led by Vice President and Director, James B. Steinberg.

The Saban Center is undertaking original research in six areas: the implications of regime change in Iraq, including post-war nation-building and Gulf security; the dynamics of the Iranian reformation; mechanisms and requirements for fulfilling a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; policy for Phase III of the war on terror, including the Syrian challenge; and political change in the Arab world.

The Center also houses the ongoing *Brookings Project on U.S. Policy Towards the Islamic World* which is directed by Dr. Peter W. Singer also a National Security Fellow in the Foreign Policy Studies Program at Brookings. This Project, established in the wake of the September 11 terror attacks, focuses on analyzing the problems that afflict the relationship between the United States and the Islamic world with the objective of developing effective policy responses. It includes a Task Force of experts that meets regularly, an annual Dialogue between American and Muslim intellectuals, a Visiting Fellows program for experts from the Islamic world, and a monograph series.



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