

Introduction

Fundamental changes are occurring in the Arab-Israeli military balance. Advances in joint warfare, strategy and tactics, human factors, and technology make up what some Western analysts call the “revolution in military affairs” (RMA). The RMA has decisively shifted the military balance from one based on force quantity to one based on force quality. At the same time, most nations in the region cannot afford to convert their forces to provide the new mix of manpower and technology required to respond to the RMA and lack the leadership skills to do so. In some cases, the inability to properly modernize conventional forces has led to a steady decline in their war-fighting capability, and even the most advanced nations must struggle to keep up.

The role of military forces is also changing. The conventional military balance is shifting from one based on conventional war fighting between Israel and its Arab neighbors to a balance based on peace and deterrence. There is little near-term prospect that Israel will fight a major war against all or most of its Arab neighbors.

Yet, there is little prospect of a full peace. Israel and the Palestinians are involved in a war of attrition. What once was a “peace process” became a “war process.” Sporadic peace efforts at best lead to temporary pauses in an enduring, low-intensity war of attrition. The victory of Hamas, a militant group dedicated to Israel’s destruction, in the Palestinian elections of January 25, 2006, threatens to make this war more intense for at least several years to come. So does Israel’s continuing expansion of its settlements, its erection of major new security barriers to separate Israel from the Palestinians, and its movement to unilaterally adjust the boundaries separating the greater Israel from the Gaza Strip, Jerusalem, and the West Bank.

This Israeli-Palestinian war of attrition creates the risk that Israel’s Arab neighbors could become involved in either direct support of the Palestinian cause or some form of asymmetric war with Israel. Syria has long manipulated Palestinian and Lebanese militants as proxies, and Iran is increasingly a player in such efforts. There

These risks are increased by the impact of Islamic extremism, division of Islam and the Arab world, and the war in Iraq. Neo-Salafi Islamic extremists have become a serious force in the regional balance. Movements like Al Qaeda have cells in Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon and raise a growing security problem. Islamist extremists tied to the Zarqawi-led branch of Al Qaeda in Iraq have conducted terrorist attacks in Jordan, and Egypt's most violent Islamist movements have links to Al Qaeda and other Islamist extremist movements throughout the world. There is a serious risk that Palestinian movements like Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad will become affiliated with such movements.

More broadly, all of the countries that make up the Arab-Israeli balance face serious internal security problems and a threat from Islamist extremists and terrorism. This threat results from both internal problems and external threats and is forcing each nation to give new priority to internal security missions.

The Iraq War is having a broader impact. Arab anger over the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq is spilling over to interact with Arab anger at U.S. support for Israel, internal problems for Arab regimes with ties to the United States and who are committed to peace with Israel. Many Arabs and Muslims perceive U.S. counterterrorism policies since "9/11" as hostile to all Arabs and Islam. In the case of Europe, the threat is also directed at those nations who have supported the United States in Iraq. Arab anger at U.S. ties to Israel is far more broadly directed at the feeling that Arab Muslim immigrants and workers are seen as inferior and denied the right to practice their religion and culture.

At a different level, Iran is also changing the Arab-Israeli balance. Neo-Salafi Islamic Extremism attacks all Shi'ites and other sects of Islam as the equivalent of apostates or nonbelievers. The emergence of such Islamists as a major force in Iraq and Iraqi insurgency and throughout the Arab world has led Iran to react. Coupled with the U.S. presence in Iraq, it has led Iran to strengthen its presence in Iraq and support Iraq's now dominant Shi'ite majority. At the same time, Iran has strengthened its ties to the Alawite-controlled regime in Syria and Shi'ite movements like Hezbollah in Lebanon. This has led Arab Sunni leaders like King Abdullah of Jordan, President Mubarak of Egypt, and Prince Saud, the Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia, to fear a "Shi'ite crescent" of Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria becoming a new threat to the region.

Iraq is also blamed for supporting Hezbollah with massive shipments of long-range rockets that can strike deep into Israel and for being a major force in smuggling arms to anti-peace Palestinian factions like Hamas and Hezbollah. Many see Iran as truly hostile to Israel, an impression reinforced by calls by Iran's Foreign Minister for Israel to be driven into the sea and his qualified denials of the Holocaust. Others see it as Iranian posturing to make Israel a common enemy and assert its status as an Islamic state and supporter of Arab causes. Both explanations may be true, but Iran's hostility takes on new meaning because of its commitment to developing long-range missiles and acquiring nuclear weapons.

is still limited. It does, however, continue to increase and could shift dramatically over the coming years if Iran succeeds in acquiring long-range missiles and weapons. The end result could shift the balance from a largely passive Israeli monopoly to a war-fighting posture based on a risk of an Israeli-Iranian exchange.

The end result is that the Arab-Israel military balance must be addressed on different terms than in the past. The conventional military balance is still of great importance, and the risk of another conventional war cannot totally be ignored. At the same time, the details of force quality have become steadily more important and must be analyzed in terms of the ability to fight joint warfare.

Issues like the Israeli-Palestinian war of attrition, Islamic extremism, and new capabilities for asymmetric warfare, however, that are emerging as critical aspects of the changing balance. Nonstate actors have emerged as key players. Internal security and counterterrorism have become as important as conventional forces. Proliferation is still more a specter of the future than a major current risk, but Iran has the potential to change the nuclear balance, and the use of other weapons for mass destruction, another critical shift in the balance.

PEACE AGREEMENTS AND THEIR IMPACT ON CONVENTIONAL WAR FIGHTING

The breakdown in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process does not mean that the peace agreements are not critical factors in the balance. The core geographical Arab-Israeli balance has always been determined by five “Arab-Israeli” nations, including Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria—and a Palestinian entity, a proto-state. Three of these nations have borders with other subregions. Syria borders on Turkey and Iraq, Jordan on Iraq and Saudi Arabia, and Egypt has borders with Sudan and Libya. The military forces of all six nations have, however, been shaped primarily by their participation in six Arab-Israeli wars, which took place in 1956, in 1967, in 1970, in 1973, and in 1982.

Past conventional conflicts have had some elements of a broader regional character, and some Gulf countries have sent forces to such conflicts in addition to their own. African states. They have also been shaped by major changes in the potential of Arab states outside the immediate Arab-Israeli “confrontation” or “ring of fire.” Iraq, however, has been the only nation outside the Arab-Israeli subregion to send significant military forces into an Arab-Israeli conflict, and it sent significant forces only during the 1973 war. Iraq has also been the only outside Middle Eastern nation with the military power to conduct long-range air or missile strikes against Israel. It fired long-range missiles at Israel during the Gulf War in 1991. (Israel used its long-range strike capability to destroy Iraq’s Osirak reactor a decade earlier.)

The political dynamics of the region have changed more quickly than its military forces. The Arab-Israeli wars of the past have been followed by peace agreements between Israel and two of its neighbors. Egypt and Israel—the two

never been a significant conventional military power or threat to Israel, although various Lebanese and Palestinian groups have launched attacks from Southern Lebanon and Israel perceives groups like Hezbollah as a serious unconventional threat.

The fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003 has eliminated Iraq as both a conventional and a missile threat to Israel or any other power for at least the next decade. At the same time, the peace proposal advanced by Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia in 2002 received support from virtually every outside Arab state. Even former radical Arab opponents of Israel like Libya seem to have abandoned any interest in serious military options, and Syria at least talks of peace. Iran is the only nation whose leader still calls for Israel to be removed from the face of the earth and raises hostile conspiracy theories such as Europe creating the ill-fated Holocaust in World War II.

Peace treaties and negotiations have made the military aspects of the "Arab-Israeli balance" into a largely Israeli-Syrian balance in terms of conventional war threats, although it is still possible that Egypt and/or Jordan could become hostile to Israel in the future. Jordan no longer plans and structures its forces around such a contingency as the primary basis for force planning. The Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement has now been tested for a quarter of a century without a major crisis or incident.

Peace must, however, be kept in perspective. Neither Egypt nor Israel deprioritizes its forces for even the prospect of a defensive conflict; both have cooperated in efforts to secure a broader peace. Egypt, for example, agreed to deploy its forces to secure its border with the Gaza Strip after the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005. Nevertheless, each state competes with the other in upgrading its conventional forces and still prepares for the contingency that the other might attack. The risk of such a conflict is also a major reason for Egypt's concern over Israel's monopoly of nuclear weapons. Ironically, their "arms race" has been fueled by massive U.S. military aid and transfers of advanced weapons and technology to both Egypt and Israel—aid and transfers that originated out of efforts to give both states an incentive to ensure they keep their peace agreement.

Jordan lacks the resources to maintain and modernize anything like the military needs for war with Israel, even for a multifront war in which it cooperates with Egypt and/or Syria. It is too vulnerable to Israel air and missile strikes to contemplate such a conflict even if it had the prospect of winning a significant land battle. Jordan does, however, structure its forces to deter and defend against an unexpected conventional military attack as well as an attack from Syria. It also cannot be certain that it will not be dragged into some future Israeli-Palestinian struggle. Peace is "security" that is "relative."

Syria is not at peace, and the Golan area remains a potential area for a major conventional conflict. Syria has become a weak and ineffective military power and can only hope to fight Israel on a defensive basis and limit the scale of an Israeli victory. Neither Egypt nor Jordan is likely to risk war on Syria's behalf, particularly in the face of Israeli air power and strike capabilities. War, however, is not un-

In short, the conventional balance may have diminished importance, but all too relevant. If one considers all of the risks involved for all of the involved, peace is “important,” but scarcely secure or “decisive.”

A SHIFT TOWARD ASYMMETRIC WARFARE AND WARS OF ATTRITION

Asymmetric war is more than a risk, it is an ongoing reality. Formal wars the Arab-Israeli states have been followed by a continuing pattern of asymmetric warfare between states, in the form of civil conflicts, and wars between states and state actors. These wars have normally been relatively low-level struggles but generally lasted years, rather than days, and most have been political and wars of attrition.

There have been three significant asymmetric Arab-Israeli conflicts in recent years. The first was the “First Intifada” between Israel and the Palestinians of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank between 1988 and 1993. The second was a struggle between Israel and an allied Christian-led Lebanese force, and Shi’ite factions in Southern Lebanon led primarily by Hezbollah with Iranian and Syrian support. This war grew out of the Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon in 1982 and lasted until Israel withdrew from Southern Lebanon in 2000. The third is the Israeli-Palestinian War which began in September 2000, led to the collapse of the Arab-Israeli peace process which has gone on ever since.

The Israeli-Palestinian War is one of the most bitter and polarizing sources of tension in the Middle East. It is a war of political and military attrition that has become a brutal struggle in which Israel has exploited its vast superiority in conventional warfare to attack Palestinian insurgents and “terrorists” in ways that have often produced significant civilian casualties and collateral damage. The Arab media is filled with images of such Israeli military activity, and the Arab world has grown steadily more angry and hostile toward Israel. This same hostility has spilled over toward the United States, as Israel’s only major ally and main weapons supplier.

At the same time, the Palestinian side has used terrorist attacks against Israelis and “soft” targets as its principal form of military action and has shown little ability to control its extremist and terrorist movements. Neither Israel nor the Palestinians have leadership that seems capable of moving toward peace unless it is forced to do so through sheer military exhaustion, and both peoples have become more distrustful of the other side and less able to understand the other side’s motives and needs. It is also harder and harder to predict whether the changes in Palestinian and Israeli leadership are moving toward enduring conflict or the prospect of a negotiated settlement.

The Palestinian presidential elections held on January 9, 2005, after the death of Yasser Arafat in November 2004, brought about the election of Mahmoud Abbas, considered a moderate, is opposed to continued violence and believes in renewing negotiations and talks with the Israelis. This brought about a renewed

Since that time, however, elections for the Palestinian national assembly led to a radical shift in Palestinian politics. On January 25, 2006, Hamas, an Islamic faction committed to struggle with Israel and regaining all Palestinian territory in Israel proper, emerged as the dominant political party in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The future of Palestinian politics, the role of the Palestinians in the peace process, and the role various Palestinian security forces, militias, and terrorist groups will play in the future have become totally uncertain.

The political changes on the Israeli side have been less dramatic, but they have significantly affected the tensions caused by Israel's ongoing expansion of its settlements and the development of East Jerusalem and territory east of the 1967 boundary between Israel and Jordan. Even Israel's unilateral withdrawals may do as much to maintain the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as to end it.

Although Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was elected in February 2001 as who was widely seen as a prosettlement and an antipeace candidate, he changed his policy over time. In 2003, he began to advance the idea of a unilateral Israeli withdrawal and the construction of security barriers in the greater Jerusalem and West Bank areas to supplement the barriers that already existed in the Gaza Strip. In a speech at a conference in Herzliya on December 18, 2003, Sharon outlined a highly controversial "Disengagement Plan" to withdraw all Israeli forces and settlers from the Gaza Strip and small settlements in the West Bank.

This plan was so controversial that Sharon almost lost to a vote of no confidence in the Knesset over the issue in 2005. He narrowly passed this vote when fifty-one members of the opposition group *Yahad* voted to uphold the government's plan. Sharon established a coalition government with Likud, Labor, and the ultraorthodox United Torah Judaism party and passed the Gaza Strip disengagement plan in the Knesset by a margin of 58 to 56 with thirteen members of his own party—Likud—opposing the plan.³ Israel went through the Gaza Strip disengagement on August 16–30, 2005, clearing the Gaza Strip of all Israeli settlers. The Israeli military presence was fully withdrawn by September 11, 2005.

This unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, and some small exposed settlements on the West Bank, established a new status quo and a new situation in which both sides began renewed negotiations. It was, however, as much a tactical strategic choice to end a pointless and an expensive commitment, and enhance the separation of Israelis and Palestinians, as a move toward peace and did not represent major progress toward ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israel still wants far more security than the Palestinians can or are willing to provide, and the Palestinians want the return of more territory and other demands that Israel is not willing to provide. Israel's expansion of its security zones and settlements is the subject of major contention, as is the status of greater Jerusalem and Israeli settlements on the West Bank. The control Abbas and secular Palestinians once exercised over Palestinian politics has become tenuous to the point of vanishing, and the strength of Hamas and other militant movements with violent antipeace e-

propeace Israelis are willing to make concessions Palestinians will accept. Violence has diminished, but scarcely ended.

The Israeli-Palestinian War has not involved direct intervention by great powers, but there have been continuing political efforts from the United States, the West, and the Arab world. A UN–U.S.–EU–Russian peace plan exists in the form of a “road map” for peace, and the United States has been notably more active since the Israeli disengagement from the Gaza Strip.

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who visited the region often in the months following the Gaza Strip disengagement, applied pressure on the Palestinians to crack down on militant groups and on the Israelis to ease up on restrictions on Palestinian movement between the Gaza Strip and Egypt and the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.⁴ The peace proposals advanced by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia remain the position of the Arab League, and Egypt has played an active role in encouraging the peace process and in providing security for its border on the Gaza Strip.

At the same time, Syria and Iran have provided extensive support to Hezbollah and some support to Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and other armed forces in all of these conflicts. Whether one labels such movements as terrorism, terrorism fighters, or nonstate combatants is a matter of perspective. What is clear is that nonstate actors are beginning to play a steadily more significant role in the Middle East Israeli balance and that states like Syria and Iran increasingly use them as proxies. Israel has struck at Syrian targets in retaliation for Syrian support of Hezbollah (and tacitly for Syrian support of Hamas and the PIJ).

In fact, the struggle between Israel and Syria is another enduring asymmetry of attrition. Syria has long used Hezbollah and its presence in Lebanon to pressure on Israel and has done so with active Iranian support. Syria has been forced to largely withdraw its military forces from Lebanon and has made political overtures toward new negotiations over the Golan. Neither Syria nor Iran, however, has abandoned their support of Hezbollah or violent Islamic Palestinian movements. A serious conflict between Israel and Syria seems unlikely, an escalation to a full proxy war coupled with repeated Israeli retaliation is all too possible.

There is also the risk that this pattern of asymmetric warfare can broaden the Israeli-Palestinian conflict deepens and violence escalates. It is unclear whether nations like Egypt and Jordan can continue to ignore the steady escalation of violence and the anger their populations have toward Israel and the United States. Syria has been particularly destabilizing for Jordan, which had a Palestinian majority. In Egypt, virtually every faction in Egypt has expressed anger at Israel or attacked it periodically. Even low-level or proxy war between Israel and Egypt and Jordan still seems possible but it is possible. It could also become much more likely if Israel should take an action that leads to massive Palestinian civil casualties or a massive expulsion of Palestinians from the West Bank.

Since the 1960s, the Arab-Israeli balance has been shaped by the fact that Israel has had a nuclear monopoly and the fact that the Arab states around it at most have a limited capability to chemical warfare. Israel has been a major nuclear power for more than three decades, has long-range missiles and strike aircraft, and may have acquired chemical and biological weapons. Israel has the air and missile power to use such weapons to strike at targets anywhere in the greater Middle East. Syria has extensive chemical weapons and missiles with chemical warheads and may have biological weapons. Egypt ceased its nuclear weapons research program in the 1970s but has continued with chemical and biological weapons research and may have small, aging stockpiles of chemical weapons.

Iran is a very different story. Iran is acquiring long-range missiles, as well as stockpiles of mass destruction. It has declared that it has chemical weapons as part of its compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention, but has not declared to the world how many, or where they are deployed. Iran's efforts to develop biological weapons are unknown, but it has the necessary technology and may have active efforts to acquire such weapons. It has denied it has nuclear weapons and has repeatedly pledged to fully comply with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and to accept inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency. Iran, however, has repeatedly asserted its right to continue to pursue nuclear technologies on multiple occasions, and the following chapters strongly indicate that Iran has active efforts to produce nuclear weapons.

The political tensions between Iran and Israel have steadily escalated in recent years, and it is clear that Israel has at least developed contingency plans to respond to Iranian nuclear facilities. Iran has made threats to retaliate. At present Iran's weapons are still in development, but there is a risk that it could give chemical and biological/radiological weapons to a proxy like Hezbollah or PIJ. Iranian efforts to proliferate cannot be divorced from those of Syria, and it is unclear that a successful Israeli or U.S. strike on Iran could end its efforts to proliferate, as distinguished from driving them underground.

THE GROWING IMPORTANCE OF INTERNAL SECURITY THREATS

Like the rest of the Middle East and North Africa region, the Arab-Israeli region faces internal security threats that in some cases are at least as serious as the external threats. These vary by country, but all are affected by the threat posed by religious extremism and movements like Al Qaeda and the violent offshoots of neo-fundamentalist groups, many of which have some past association with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt:

- Egypt has long faced a low-level threat from such movements, particularly the *Group for Islamic Revival*, or Islamic Group. It is fighting a constant struggle to suppress such movements, which have attacked the regime, Egyptian moderates, and tourists. The



Map 1.1 The Arab-Israeli Ring States (University of Texas Library)

problems have been compounded by Egyptian government efforts to suppress or curb opposition movements, which have had the effect of driving some Egyptians toward extremism.

- Israel faces problems with antipeace/anti-Arab extremist groups like Hamas. These groups lack anything approaching Israel's military strength and have been able to do little more than carry out bombings, suicide attacks, and low-level ambushes, but they present a continuing threat. Furthermore, the Israeli-Palestinian War and the creation of security walls and other measures have alienated Israeli-Arabs and have given extremist movements a strong incentive to find ways to use asymmetric/terrorist attacks in the future.
- Jordan has played a strong role in supporting both the peace process with Israel and the U.S. intervention in Iraq. A large number of Jordanians oppose these, however, and many express sympathy with Al Qa'ida and Islamist extremist groups. Such groups have made major attempts to attack Jordanian and U.S. targets in Jordan and successfully carried out a terrorist attack on three hotels in Jordan in the fall of 2005. Jordan faces further

express anger at Israel and the United States over the Palestinian issue. Some Jordanians and Palestinians in Jordan support violent Palestinian movements like Hamas and Hezbollah, and controlling them requires constant intervention by the Jordanian security services.

- Lebanon remains deeply divided by sect. National unity remains tenuous, and political violence is a serious problem, and the situation is further complicated by Syrian efforts to maintain political control and influence that include the support of assassination, intimidation, and bribery. Hezbollah and Amal remain relatively well-armed militant groups supported by Iran and Syria. Other sects are also armed. Lebanon's military forces are weak and unwilling to confront Hezbollah, and the Lebanese security forces are corrupt, and subject to Syrian influence. Sometimes violent Lebanese action against Palestinian refugees adds a further complication.
- The Palestinian movement is increasingly divided among the "secular" Palestinian Authority, rival Islamic movements like Hamas and the PIJ, and a variety of other anti-peace/anti-Palestinian Authority groups. The Palestinian Authority is itself deeply divided and has been unable to create unified and effective security forces. Strong nationalist elements within the Palestinian Authority want new political leadership and/or to take a more hostile position toward Israel. Internal Palestinian violence is a constant problem.
- Syria remains a de facto dictatorship under Ba'ath and Alawite control. Its intelligence services directly support internal violence and terrorism in Lebanon, Israel, and Iraq. At the same time, Syria faces internal threats from its Sunni population and elements of the "Muslim Brotherhood." There were an increasing number of violent confrontations in 2005. While little is known about the structure and depth of internal opposition, Syrian internal security services have become steadily more repressive.