



U.S. Foreign Policy and Israel's Qualitative Military Edge

The Need for a Common Vision

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Front cover: Two U.S.-made Apache Longbow helicopters, newly purchased by the Israeli air force, maneuver at the Ramon Air Force Base in southern Israel during a presentation to the media, April 10, 2005. Copyright AP Wide World Photos/Israel Defense Forces.

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Introduction

THE U.S. COMMITMENT to maintain Israel's qualitative military edge (QME) is a long-standing tradition that every president since Lyndon Johnson has maintained and reiterated. The basic principle behind this commitment is simple: Israel is a bastion of liberal representative government in the Middle East, and, as such, its continued survival is a vital national interest of the United States.¹ To ensure this longtime ally's continued existence in a sea of nations that reflexively call for its destruction, Israel must be able to defend itself militarily and deter potential aggression. In this effort, Israel will always be militarily outnumbered with regard to the artillery, tanks, and combat aircraft that can be deployed by a coalition of Arab states.² Israel's continued survival can be ensured only if it is able to maintain *qualitative* military superiority, relying on superior weaponry, tactics, training, leadership, and other factors of military effectiveness to deter or defeat its numerically superior adversaries in the Middle East.³

In this paper, we (a) analyze the historical evolution of Israel's strategy of maintaining a qualitative military edge and the ways in which Israeli and U.S. conceptualizations of QME have diverged over time, (b) discuss how the emergence of Iran as an existential threat to both Israel *and* the Arab Gulf states has fundamentally altered the QME calculus, (c) propose an interim

analytical framework to help guide U.S. arms sales in the region, and (d) discuss other political and strategic decisions that may affect Israel's QME over the near and long terms. By design, this paper views QME primarily through the lens of U.S. national interests and foreign/military policy. Although we certainly address Israeli concerns, the fundamental purpose of this analysis is to better define QME within the framework of U.S. defense strategy.

Specifically, we contend that while maintenance of Israel's QME continues to be in the strategic interest of the United States, the shifting and increasingly complicated political and military dynamics in the Middle East demand a clearer definition of QME, and mutual agreement between the United States and Israel about how that QME can and should be maintained. As the conventional weaponry and training of other regional states have steadily improved, Israel relies increasingly on its unacknowledged nuclear capabilities to deter its potential adversaries,⁴ lessening any effect that U.S. arms sales in the region might have on QME.⁵ For the United States, arms sales are powerful political and military signals of U.S. intentions to stand by its allies, both Israeli and Arab.

At the same time, the identity of those potential adversaries against whom QME must be maintained is changing. Former enemies and adversaries of Israel,

1. President George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, March 2006, p. 5. Available online (www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss/2006/nss2006.pdf).
2. Marlin Fitzwater, "Maintaining Israel's Qualitative Military Edge: Dilemmas for the Bush Administration," *Jerusalem Issue Brief* 1, no. 12, (December 16, 2001). Available online (www.jcpa.org/art/brief1-12.htm).
3. Often referred to as the "human factor," or "combat effectiveness," military effectiveness is the ability of an armed service to prosecute military operations and use weaponry in military operations. It is a measure of the quality of an army's personnel (rather than the quality or quantity of its materiel or quantity of its men and women). See J.F.C. Fuller, *The Foundation of the Science of War* (London: Hutchinson & Co., Ltd., 1925), and Kenneth Pollack, *Arabs at War: Military Effectiveness, 1948-1991* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002). In *Arabs at War* (pp. 1-13), Ken Pollack concludes that "in the Middle East, military effectiveness has played the decisive role determining the outcomes of the various wars fought between Arabs and their foes. Israel's triumphs over larger and better-armed Arab armies have been a clear sign that the military balance in the region has primarily been driven by the effectiveness of the opposing forces rather than numbers, equipment, or any other material factor." Military effectiveness can also go a long way in explaining Hizballah's 2006 successes against Israel in Lebanon. Elements of military effectiveness include unit cohesion, generalship, tactical leadership, information management, technical skills and weapons handling, logistics and maintenance, morale, training, and cowardice.
4. Gerald M. Steinberg, "The Vanunu Myths and Israeli Deterrence Policy," *Jerusalem Issue Brief* 3, no. 22 (April 19, 2004). Available online (www.jcpa.org/brief/brief3-22.htm). See also "Deterrence and Destruction," *Newsweek*, August 4, 2006. Available online (www.newsweek.com/id/466666).
5. Israeli national security strategy is founded on the premise that Israel cannot afford to lose a single war. Because the best way to avoid losing a war is not to fight it in the first place, Israeli strategy begins with the maintenance of a credible deterrent posture, which includes the willingness to carry out preemptive strikes. Should deterrence fail, Israel would seek to prevent escalation and determine the outcome of war quickly and decisively. Because it lacks strategic depth, Israel must prevent the enemy from entering its territory and must try to transfer the battle to enemy territory quickly.

such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, now pose a significantly reduced direct threat. In fact, many Middle Eastern states find themselves strategically aligned in part with Israel⁶ in their desire to contain and deter an increasingly aggressive (in terms of foreign policy) and expansionist (in terms of influence rather than territorial ambitions) Iranian regime that is pursuing nuclear capabilities of its own. As *New York Times* columnist David Brooks points out, “Iran has done what decades of peace proposals have not done—brought Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, the Palestinians and the U.S. together.”⁷ Some of these Arab nations may eventually prove to be at least tacit allies in the effort to contain Iran if it becomes nuclear-weapons capable.

With the anachronistic strategic bifurcation of the Middle East into Israel and a monolithic group of Arab states no longer analytically useful (if it ever was), traditional assumptions regarding QME no longer hold true. For example, the sale of sophisticated conventional weaponry to the Arab states no longer necessarily implies a corresponding reduction in Israel's QME. Instead, such a sale is a double-edged sword, reducing Israel's QME to the extent such Arab states continue to represent Israeli adversaries, but at the same time effectively *increasing* Israel's QME by improving the military capability of states aligned with it in their desire to deter Iranian threats and aggression.

This paper proposes a more holistic, nuanced way of conceptualizing Israel's QME that not only inoculates Israel against foreseeable threats, but also supports and accounts for the shared Israeli and American goal of ensuring that U.S.-allied Arab states continue to maintain sufficient military capabilities to provide

a meaningful deterrent to Iranian aggression.⁸ From a practical standpoint, we propose using this new analytical framework to help guide the day-to-day U.S. decisions that affect QME—most important, decisions related to significant arms releases in the region.

Determining and Reporting QME

The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs is responsible for weapons sales and exports and, therefore, has the U.S. interagency lead for QME. Its determinations can be made during the Exception to National Disclosure Policy⁹ or the Foreign Military Sales process. In practice, the State Department relies on inputs from the Department of Defense and the intelligence community to make QME determinations.

Traditionally, assessing QME has been a subjective calculation based upon analyses of a variety of military, political, and social factors. The process involves input from the State Department, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency, the Joint Staff, the defense intelligence community, the combatant commands, and the services. At the annual Department of Defense Joint Political Military Group meeting, the Israelis typically make a presentation that includes a list of systems they deem threatening to their QME.

Although no congressional mandate requires submission of a report on Israel's QME from a qualitative or quantitative basis, section 404(c) of the *Foreign Relations Authorization Act*, fiscal years (FY) 1992 and 1993 (Public Law 102-138), requires the president to submit to Congress an annual report (the *Middle East Arms Transfer Report*). The report documents all transfers of

6. Israel and the Sunni states currently have a partially shared threat perception but not a confluence of interests or an ability to act on their nascent alliance (at least not yet). For the Sunni states, Israel is at best tolerable, for some not really that, and they are unlikely to risk direct joint cooperation with Israel in the near term (at least without the coordinating efforts of the United States).

7. Brooks goes on to state, “You can go to Jerusalem or to some Arab capitals and the diagnosis of the situation is the same: Iran is gaining hegemonic strength over the region and is spreading tentacles of instability all around.” David Brooks, “Present at the Creation,” *New York Times*, November 6, 2007.

8. The authors acknowledge that the capability to deter Iranian aggression and the intent to do so are two very different propositions. Although a full examination of Arab intentions and national or cultural motivations is beyond the scope of this paper, see the following sources for excellent treatments of the subject: David Lamb, *The Arabs: Journeys beyond the Mirage* (New York: Vintage, 2002); Margaret K. Nydell, *Understanding Arabs: A Guide for Modern Times*, 4th ed. (New York: Intercultural Press, 2005); and William Wunderle, *A Manual for American Servicemen in the Arab Middle East* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, forthcoming).

9. The interagency community routinely considers release of sensitive weapons systems through the National Disclosure Policy Committee. A sensitive weapons system can be released only with consensus support for release of that system. The General Committee members are the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of the Army, the Secretary of the Navy, the Secretary of the Air Force, and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff.

conventional and unconventional arms by any nation to the Middle East and Persian Gulf region over the previous calendar year and analyzes their effect on the current military balance in the region. Additionally, when the Defense Security Cooperation Agency notifies Congress of proposed arms sales to the Middle East, it includes a statement about the expected impact on Israel's QME. No U.S. intelligence agency does an annual review of Israel's QME or the effect of U.S. arms sales in the region, and Congress can and has objected to the executive branch's determinations of weapons release.

Conflicting Definitions of Israel's Qualitative Military Edge

Israel defines QME as "the ability to sustain credible military advantage that provides deterrence and, if need be, the ability to rapidly achieve superiority on the battlefield against any *foreseeable* combination of forces with minimal damage and casualties."¹⁰ In assessing QME, Israel focuses on the threats from advanced weapons systems rather than on platforms (with the exception of submarines and unmanned aerial vehicles and systems). Other considerations include geographic proximity, transferability, precedents, and synergy between different systems.

As stated previously, every U.S. administration since the mid-1960s has at least tacitly supported Israeli QME. Despite this support, no official U.S. government definition of QME exists, and the National Security Strategy does not mention QME.¹¹ Nevertheless, the authors have found numerous statements from various administrations affirming the U.S. commitment to maintain Israel's QME that suggest the basic

framework of a working definition. These comments ranged from "we will maintain Israel's qualitative military edge and its ability to defend itself, by itself,"¹² to presidential statements reiterating "the steadfast U.S. commitment to Israel's security, to the maintenance of its qualitative military edge."¹³ Members of Congress have said they "believe that sales of sophisticated equipment could erode Israel's qualitative edge over its Arab neighbors, if the Gulf states were to join a joint Arab military action against Israel."¹⁴

The FY 2007 Department of Defense foreign military financing submission states that this year's assistance to Israel "will serve the following U.S. goals:

- Maintaining the Israeli Defense Forces' (IDF) qualitative edge in the regional balance of power; strengthening Israel's ability to deter threats and defend itself
- Preventing regional conflict; assisting Israel in achieving our shared goals of countering terrorism and weapons of mass destruction proliferation
- Building the confidence necessary for Israel to take calculated risks for peace, as evidenced by Israel's disengagement from Gaza and parts of the northern West Bank in 2005."¹⁵

Although there is no official U.S. government definition of QME, American policymakers have often described QME as ensuring that Israel has the ability to defend itself against any *likely* combination of regional threats.¹⁶ U.S. military strategists also tend to

10. Israeli government, "Israel's Qualitative Military Edge," presentation to the Defense Policy Advisory Group, April 2006 (emphasis added by the authors). See also Louis Rene Beres, "Israel's Uncertain Strategic Future," *Parameters* (Spring 2007), pp. 37–54.

11. Research and interviews conducted in support of this paper suggest that this lack of an official QME definition may be purposeful and represent intentional ambiguity on the part of multiple U.S. administrations.

12. Warren Christopher, "Maintaining the Momentum for Peace in the Middle East" (speech by the then secretary of state at Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., October 24, 1994); Barry Rubin, "The United States and the Middle East, 1994," in Ami Ayalon, *Middle East Contemporary Survey, 1994*, vol. 18 (New York: Westview Press, 1996).

13. President George H.W. Bush, "Address with Israeli President Yitzhak Rabin," U.S. Department of State Dispatch, August 17, 1992. Available online (http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1584/is_n33_v3/ai_12686821).

14. Michael Towle "Senators Say They Now Support F-16 Sale," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, August 25, 1998.

15. U.S. Department of State, *Congressional Budget Justification: Foreign Operations, Fiscal Year 2007*, released February 13, 2006, p. 462. Available online (www.state.gov/documents/organization/60641.pdf).

16. Marlin Fitzwater, "Maintaining Israel's Qualitative Military Edge: Dilemmas for the Bush Administration," *Jerusalem Issue Brief* 1, no. 12 (December 16, 2001) (emphasis added by the authors). Available online (www.jcpa.org/art/brief1-12.htm).

view QME more broadly¹⁷ than their Israeli counterparts, seeing it as the aggregate of all those factors that enhance a military's capabilities over those of its adversaries.¹⁸ In contrast, for reasons of influencing U.S. weapons sales, Israel tends to focus on the virtues and capabilities of specific weapons systems when discussing and advocating its qualitative edge with U.S. audiences. The government of Israel favors an expansive definition of QME-related threats, whereas the United States advocates an interpretation based upon realistic short- to midterm threats. As stated earlier, these differing views of QME create disagreements between Israel and the United States on some arms sales to the Middle East.¹⁹

The U.S. government must, first and foremost, defend the vital interests of the United States and its citizens. Any U.S. decision on weapons sales to the region must look at the broader military balance, considering the arms to be sold while also factoring Israel's

superior tactics and military effectiveness, Arab military effectiveness and capabilities, the current political-military environment and, most important, U.S. foreign policy interests.²⁰

These issues highlight the fact that, although most analysts and political leaders seem to know what QME is, it is not universally understood; nor (from the U.S. perspective) is there an analytical framework or methodology to assess what it comprises. According to the Israeli definition, QME can equate to Israel versus most of the Arab Middle East and Iran (i.e., the "foreseeable" threat issue). The obvious question arising from this definitional disparity is, "Qualitative edge against whom?" If the traditional Israeli definition were taken at face value, the United States would be prohibited from arming Gulf allies that are at least nominally supporting U.S. policy vis-à-vis Iran. This factor is significant, given that both the Gulf states and Israel rightly view the Iranian regime as their greatest military concern.

17. That is, they include the quality and technology of its weapons, as well as the quality of leadership, personnel, battle management, research and development infrastructure, logistics, morale, and reliability of alliances.

18. Lt. Col. Stephen H. Gotowicki, "Considering a U.S. Military Force on the Golan: Confronting Hyperbole, Paranoia, Hysteria, and Agendas," Foreign Military Studies Office, U.S. Army, May 8, 1996.

19. David S. Cloud and Helene Cooper, "Israel's Protests Are Said to Stall Gulf Arms Sale," *New York Times*, April 5, 2007. Available online (www.nytimes.com/2007/04/05/world/middleeast/05weapons.html?n=Top%2fReference%2fTimes%20Topics%2fPeople%2fC%2fCloud%2c%20David%20S%2e). See also David S. Cloud, "Gates Assures Israel on Plan to Sell Arms to Saudis," *New York Times*, April 20, 2007, p. 13.

20. For an excellent analysis of a conflict and resolution of the U.S. arms sales to the region, see Lt. Col. Robert C. Dooley, USAF, "The F-16 Block 60 Sale to the United Arab Emirates: Was the Horse Let Out of the Barn?" National Defense University, 2004. Available online from U.S. military or government addresses (www.ndu.edu/nwc/writing/AY04/5603/5603%20Best%20Paper--Seminar%20L.pdf).

Historical Background

U.S. INTERESTS are inextricably linked with those of Israel for historic, moral, and political reasons. Ever since President Harry Truman recognized the new Jewish state on May 14, 1948,¹ the United States has supported or implicitly guaranteed its survival.² During the Cold War, Israel was an essential partner in the struggle to limit Soviet influence in the region. In the post–Cold War era, the United States continues to support Israel’s security through a combination of means—not the least of which is major security assistance enabling Israel to maintain its QME over any likely combination of aggressors. Moreover, the United States supports Israel in its pursuit of a peaceful and stable regional framework with its neighbors for the long term.

David Ben Gurion, the first prime minister of Israel, established Israel’s basic defense doctrine in 1953. Among its fundamental axioms was that “Israel is and will continue to be quantitatively inferior vis-à-vis the Arab world and, therefore, in order to balance this, Israel must develop a very strong qualitative edge.”³ Although Israel adopted this doctrine early in its existence, two decades would pass before the United States actively supported its implementation.

With the Six Day War in 1967, the United States saw a democracy (Israel) defeat the combined forces of multiple Soviet-backed countries. The perception in

Washington was that many Arab states (notably Egypt) had permanently drifted toward the Soviets. Following the pivotal 1967 war, Israel’s nascent qualitative edge (supplied with French weapons at the time), even when fighting on three fronts, led future Egyptian president Anwar Sadat to conclude that Israel could not easily be defeated militarily.⁴ This realization set the intellectual stage for the future Egyptian-Israeli settlement and bolstered the argument within the Israeli government that QME serves as a political as well as a purely military deterrent. In 1968, with strong support from Congress, President Johnson approved the sale of F-4 Phantom fighters to Israel, establishing the first precedent for U.S. support of Israel’s qualitative edge over its neighbors.

In the aftermath of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, the United States tacitly adopted the doctrine of actively maintaining Israel’s QME. After that war, the United States quadrupled its foreign aid to Israel, effectively replacing France as Israel’s largest arms supplier.⁵ This policy was based both on U.S. appreciation for Israel’s role as a defender of Western values in a generally hostile region and on the Cold War strategy of opposing Arab client states of the Soviet Union. The United States, however, continued supplying weaponry to Israel’s neighbors—Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and later Egypt⁶—to counter Soviet arms sales in the region.

1. In a foreshadowing of the current debate over assistance to Israel, Truman was a supporter of the Zionist movement, whereas then secretary of state George C. Marshall feared that U.S. support for a Jewish state would harm relations with the Muslim world, limit access to Middle Eastern oil, and destabilize the region.
2. Romesh Ratnesar, “May 14, 1948,” *Time*, March 31, 2003. Available online (www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1004510,00.html). See also “Letter from Eliahu Epstein to President Truman, May 14, 1948, statement by President Truman, June 5, 1947. Telegram regarding President Truman’s announcement that the U. S. had officially recognized Palestine’s new provisional government, May 14, 1948.” Available online (www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/israel/large/documents/index.php?documentdate=1948-05-14&documentid=49&collectionid=ROI&pagenumber=1).
3. Dr. Yuval Steinitz, “The Growing Threat to Israel’s Qualitative Military Edge,” *Jerusalem Issue Brief* 3, no. 10 (December 11, 2003).
4. Anwar Sadat, *The Public Diary of President Sadat: The Road to War*, ed. Raphael Israeli (New York: Brill Publishing, 1978), pp. 36, 77, 99, 225. Also see Philip C. Wilcox Jr., “The Legacy of the 1967 War: Victory or Defeat for Israel?” Foundation for Middle East Peace, June 8, 2007. Available online (www.fmep.org/analysis/articles/the_legacy_of_the_1967_war.html).
5. Palestinian Facts, “Israel 1967–1991: Yom Kippur War Result.” Available online (www.palestinefacts.org/pf_1967to1991_ykwar_result.php). Because France totally embargoed arms sales to Israel immediately after the Six Day War in 1967, the United States had quite definitely already supplanted France as Israel’s main arms supplier before 1973.
6. Federation of American Scientists, “Arms Sales Monitoring Project.” Available online (www.fas.org/asmp/library/asm/asm01.html). See also, Jeremy M. Sharp, “CRS Report for Congress: Egypt: Background and U.S. Relations,” Congressional Research Service RL33003, March 29, 2007, p. 33. As a “reward” for signing the Camp David peace accords in 1979, both Egypt and Israel received multiple land, sea, and air weapons systems previously denied them. The centerpiece of the initial phase of this assistance was the U.S. decision to sell Egypt the F-16, one of the most modern fighters the United States had to offer. Egypt obtained a total of 220 aircraft in four batches through the Peace Vector series of programs:

Today, Israel remains the largest recipient of U.S. foreign military financing, recently signing a \$30 billion military aid agreement (a 25 percent increase) over the next decade.⁷

This de facto commitment to maintaining Israel's qualitative edge was first made explicit by President Ronald Reagan and has been reiterated by every subsequent U.S. administration.⁸ Nonetheless, during the Reagan years, the qualitative gap between Israel and its largest potential Arab foe, Saudi Arabia, shrank dramatically.⁹ With the 1981 sale of AWACS airborne radar systems to Saudi Arabia, the United States eroded the Israeli air force's edge over a potentially hostile Arab coalition. As Israel's technological advantage in weapons systems was allowed to diminish throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the United States argued that it was maintaining the QME at the subsystem level (improved software and more-lethal targeting systems). Successive American administrations also pointed to the fact that superior Israeli tactics and training would more than compensate for any Arab advantage gained by high-tech arms sales to these potential Israeli adversaries.

Inarguably, Israel's superior tactics and military effectiveness—including better motivated, trained, and led troops—contribute positively to its qualitative edge. The key point of disagreement between Israel

and the United States seems to be whether this personnel, leadership, and training superiority can offset the advantage obtained by Arab states from U.S. sales of high-tech weaponry and increased U.S. training of their forces. Since the mid-1980s, many of Israel's traditional adversaries have been teaching their troops U.S.-style combat tactics, sending their officers and senior enlisted troops to U.S. and European military courses, and participating in joint exercises with American and other Western troops. Israeli officials point out that, "to an unknown degree, the superiority of Israel's combat tactics over those of its foes has decreased."¹⁰

For the past three decades, the United States fulfilled its QME commitment to Israel by downgrading the capability of weapons systems that it sold to Arab states or upgrading versions sold to Israel.¹¹ On several occasions, the United States sold "balancing" weapons packages¹² to the Israelis whenever it concluded a major deal with Saudi Arabia¹³ or another Middle Eastern nation.¹⁴

Although increased U.S. involvement and arms sales in the Middle East since the 1980s may have had the cumulative effect of degrading the capability gap between Israel and the Arab Middle East, the ultimate expression of Israel's QME is its not-so-secret possession of a nuclear arsenal.¹⁵ According to current

- 42 Block 15 F-16A/Bs, including 34 F-16As and 8 F-16Bs, with deliveries beginning in 1982. Although most of these aircraft were built at the General Dynamics plant in Fort Worth, one F-16B was obtained from the Fokker production line in the Netherlands.
 - 40 Block 32 F-16C/Ds, including 34 F-16Cs and 6 F-16Ds, with initial deliveries in 1994.
 - 138 Block 40 F-16C/Ds, including 102 F-16Cs and 36 F-16Ds, with initial deliveries in 1991. These machines were fitted for carriage of AIM-7 Sparrow. Many of the Egyptian Block 40 F-16s were built by Tusas Aircraft Industries in Turkey.
- Available online (www.faq.s.org/docs/air/avf163.html#m4).
7. Steven Erlanger, "Israel to Get \$30 Billion in Military Aid from U.S.," *New York Times*, August 17, 2007. Available online (www.nytimes.com/2007/08/17/world/middleeast/17israel.html?pagewanted=print).
 8. Colin L. Powell, "Remarks at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee," U.S. Department of State website, March 19, 2001. Available online (www.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/2001/1373.htm).
 9. Marlin Fitzwater, "Maintaining Israel's Qualitative Military Edge: Dilemmas for the Bush Administration," *Jerusalem Issue Brief* 1, no. 12, (December 16, 2001). Available online (www.jcpa.org/art/brief1-12.htm).
 10. Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA) Online, "The Qualitative Edge," April 1, 1994. Available online (www.jinsa.org/articles/articles.html/function/view/categoryid/116/documentid/209/history/3,2359,947,653,116,209). See also Louis Rene Beres, "Israel's Uncertain Strategic Future," *Parameters* (Spring 2007), pp. 37–54.
 11. Shai Feldman and Abdullah Toukan, *Bridging the Gap: A Future Security Architecture for the Middle East*, Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict Series, Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1997, p. 48. Available online (www.wilsoncenter.org/subsites/ccpdc/pubs/brgap/bkfr.htm).
 12. JINSA Online, "AMRAAM Said NOT to Impact on Israel's Qualitative Military Edge," May 1, 1995. Available online (www.jinsa.org/articles/articles.html/function/view/categoryid/105/documentid/272/history/3,2359,947,653,105,272).
 13. Martin Tolchin, "U.S. to Sell Helicopters to Israelis to Balance Jet Deal with Saudis," *New York Times*, September 22, 1992.
 14. Daniel Pipes and Adam Garfinkle, "High-Tech Planes to Saudi Arabia?" *DanielPipes.org*, September 1992. Available online (www.danielpipes.org/article/222).
 15. The not-so-secret existence of Israeli nuclear weapons is illustrated by the declassification of large numbers of formerly highly classified U.S. government documents showing that by 1975 the United States was convinced that Israel had nuclear weapons.

president and former Israeli prime minister Shimon Peres, “The suspicion and fog surrounding this question are constructive, because they strengthen our deterrent.”¹⁶ According to unclassified U.S. intelligence estimates, Israel possesses between 75 and 130 nuclear weapons.¹⁷ Because of Israel's intentional strategic ambiguity, the role of nuclear weapons in Israeli Defense Forces doctrine is a matter of speculation.¹⁸ A cursory analysis would indicate that, strategically, Israel uses its long-range missiles and nuclear-capable aircraft to deter both conventional and unconventional attacks, or to launch “the Samson Option,”¹⁹ an all-out attack against an adversary should defenses fail and population centers be threatened. Despite Israel's insistence that it will not be the first country to introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East,²⁰ these systems represent an effective preemptive strike force. Furthermore, Israel deploys tactical systems designed to rapidly reduce an invading force.

Through its nuclear policy, Israel has the “benefit of being perceived as a nuclear power while at the same time not enduring potential punishment by the international community.”²¹ No potential Middle Eastern adversary could initiate hostile action against Israel

without considering the potentially fatal consequences to its own nation. The fact that the United States never openly questions Israel's need for this arsenal or criticizes its continued expansion is an unmistakable demonstration of U.S. commitment to QME, particularly in light of the fact that this silence is at sharp odds with the publicly articulated U.S. government positions on nuclear nonproliferation.²²

This brief historical examination of QME highlights the fact that Israel and the United States often differ on the exact meaning and definition of QME and its application in the region. Nevertheless, the United States will continue to implicitly guarantee the security of Israel in the foreseeable future. Thus, the United States will assist Israel in retaining its qualitative military edge, ensuring the government of Israel will have the ability to defend itself against any *likely* combination of regional conventional forces.

Although the basic QME paradigm has not changed since its inception during the Cold War, for the first time both Arab states and the Israelis now face the same potential foe—Iran. These changing dynamics call for reassessing how both the United States and Israel look at QME.

16. Shimon Peres, testimony at the 1986 trial of Mordechai Vanunu, quoted in “Israel's Nuclear Programme,” BBC News, December 22, 2003. Available online (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3340639.stm).

17. Ehsan Ahrari, “Nuclear Israel: Belling the Cat,” *Asian Times*, March 19, 2007.

18. Center for Defense Information Terrorism Project, “Iran, Israel and Nuclear Weapons in the Middle East,” February 14, 2002. Available online (www.cdi.org/terrorism/menukes-pr.cfm).

19. Warner Farr, “The Third Temple's Holy of Holies: Israel's Nuclear Weapons,” Counterproliferation Paper 2 (U.S. Air Force Counterproliferation Center, September 1999). In addition to the “Samson Option” of last resort, other triggers for nuclear use may have included successful Arab penetration of populated areas, destruction of the Israeli air force, airstrikes or chemical/biological strikes on Israeli cities, Arab use of nuclear weapons, massive civilian or military casualties, occupation of major population centers, or the very survival of the state of Israel. See also Avner Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), pp. 273–274, and Michael Karpin, *The Bomb in the Basement: How Israel Went Nuclear and What That Means for the World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006).

20. Federation of American Scientists, “WMD around the World,” Israel Special Weapons Guide, Israeli Nuclear Weapons. Available online (<http://fas.org/nuke/guide/israel/nuke/>).

21. Lionel Beehner, “Israel's Nuclear Program and Middle East Peace,” Council on Foreign Relations Backgrounder, February 10, 2006. Available online (www.cfr.org/publication/9822/israels_nuclear_program_and_middle_east_peace.html#5).

22. Israel has never signed the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the 1968 agreement designed to limit the spread of nuclear weapons.

The Nature of the Iranian Threat

IRAN POSES A THREAT to the United States and its allies because of its sponsorship of terrorism, support for the insurgency in Iraq, and probable pursuit of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). As stated by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, “The regime’s aggressive foreign policy and hegemonic aspirations, as demonstrated by its lethal assistance to militants in Iraq, Lebanon, Afghanistan, and the Palestinian territories, further underscores the threat to regional stability posed by Tehran.”¹ Strategically, U.S. government actions in Iraq and Afghanistan have created an environment of instability that has enabled Iran to assert itself as a regional power. This strategic environment is part of what has fueled Iran’s aggressive nuclear program. Although Iran’s acquisition of nuclear weapons could be delayed through a combination of technical activities, military action, and diplomacy, such delay would not remove the underlying Iranian motivation to possess this technology—as a strategic deterrent against U.S. military action and a perceived guarantor of regime survival.² Short of massive military intervention and subsequent regime change, Iran will continue to pursue development of the nuclear fuel cycle and seek to expand its influence in the Gulf region.³

Sponsorship of Terror

The July 2006 Hizballah attacks on Israel are the latest use of terrorism by Iran to advance its regional policy goals in the Middle East. Iran has used terrorism over the years as a means of projecting power and against internal dissidents and other adversaries in Europe.

The State Department’s *Country Reports on Terrorism 2004*⁴ calls Iran “the most active state sponsor of terrorism,” stating that the Ministry of Intelligence and Security and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps both “provided Lebanese Hizballah and Palestinian terrorist groups—notably Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigade, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command—with funding, safe haven, training and weapons.” Secretary of State Rice has referred to Iran as the “central banker for terrorism.”⁵

Support for the Insurgency in Iraq

Iran seeks a weakened and Shiite-dominated Iraq that is incapable of posing a threat to Iran. Iranian involvement in Iraq is extensive and poses a serious threat to U.S. national interests and U.S. troops. While actively interfering in Iraqi politics, Iran provides training, funds, and weapons to a variety of Shiite militias in Iraq that have been linked to assassinations, human rights abuses, and the planting of improvised explosive devices designed to maim and kill U.S. and coalition troops.⁶

Pursuit of Weapons of Mass Destruction

Most troubling to the governments of Israel and the United States, Iran is very likely producing weapons of mass destruction in the form of chemical and biological agents, and possibly nuclear arms as well. It is also enriching uranium in defiance of UN Security Council

1. Condoleezza Rice, “Testimony of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs,” October 24, 2007. Available online (<http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/110/ric102407.htm>).
2. Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America* (New York: Random House, 2004), p. 237. See also, George Perkovich, “Iran Is Not an Island: A Strategy to Mobilize the Neighbors,” *Policy Brief* 34, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 2005.
3. Unless otherwise noted, the following summary of the nature of the Iranian threat has been taken from the following source: U.S. House of Representatives, Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, *Recognizing Iran as a Strategic Threat: An Intelligence Challenge for the United States*, Staff Report of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Subcommittee on Intelligence Policy, August 23, 2006.
4. U.S. Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2004*, Department of State Publication 11248, April 2005. Available online (www.state.gov/documents/organization/45313.pdf).
5. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, “Roundtable with Australian, Indonesian and Latin American Journalists” (Washington, D.C., March 9, 2006). Transcript available online (www.state.gov/secretary/tm/2006/62968.htm).
6. Clay Wilson, “Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) in Iraq and Afghanistan: Effects and Countermeasures,” Congressional Research Service Report for Congress 22330, updated August 28, 2007. Available online (<http://fas.org/sgp/crs/weapons/RS22330.pdf>).

resolutions and openly upgrading the capabilities of its ballistic missiles. The December 2007 U.S. National Intelligence Estimate does not prove that Iran has abandoned covert nuclear weapons research and production, only that a known military program was suspended at some point during 2003. (Iran may have other redundant programs, or it may have resumed weapons research in 2005 as Israel asserts.)⁷

Chemical and biological weapons. U.S. intelligence agencies have determined Iran is likely pursuing chemical and biological weapons. Although such weapons would be of limited military value, they could nevertheless change the nature of a conflict, because they would have psychological and possibly political effects far greater than their actual magnitude.⁸

Ballistic missiles. Iran's ballistic missile inventory is among the largest in the Middle East. One of the most disturbing aspects of the Iranian WMD program is its determined effort to construct ballistic missiles that will enable Tehran to deliver conventional (or, potentially, chemical, biological, or nuclear) warheads against its neighbors in the region and beyond. Iran claimed last fall that its Shahab-3 missile could strike targets at distances up to 1,200 miles, which would include Israel, Egypt, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, and southeastern Europe. We believe that Iran's Shahab-4 will have a range of 2,400 miles, allowing Iran to strike Germany, Italy, and Russia as far as Moscow.⁹

Nuclear weapons. Two decades ago, Iran embarked on a secret program to acquire the capability to produce weapons-grade nuclear material. Iran has developed an extensive infrastructure, from laboratories to industrial facilities, to support its research for nuclear weapons. Iran's efforts since December 2005 to resume enrichment of uranium in defiance of the international

community, along with its willingness to endure international condemnation, isolation, and economic disruptions to carry out nuclear activities covertly, indicate that Iran could be developing a nuclear weapons capability (a possibility the recent U.S. National Intelligence Estimate acknowledges).¹⁰ At a minimum, Iran seeks to advertise its nuclear progress to the world, which, in terms of the regional political-military dynamics affecting the QME calculus, may be effectively equivalent.

Our research and analysis leads us to believe Iran could have a nuclear weapon sometime in the beginning to the middle of the next decade. The timetable for an Iranian program depends on a wide range of factors, such as the acquisition of key components and materials, successful testing, outside assistance, and the effect of domestic and international political pressures. It also depends on Iran's overcoming technical hurdles to master the technology and on its leaders' not being deterred from developing nuclear weapons in the interim.

A nuclear-armed Iran would pose a serious strategic threat to the United States and its allies because

- The leadership in Tehran would be emboldened to advance its aggressive ambitions in and outside of the region, both directly and through the terrorists it supports—ambitions that gravely threaten the stability and the security of U.S. friends and allies.
- An Iranian leadership that believes a nuclear arsenal protects it from retaliation may be more likely to use force against U.S. forces and allies in the region, the greater Middle East, Europe, and Asia. Nuclear weapons could thus lower the threshold for Iran's use of conventional force.
- It would likely exacerbate regional tensions. Israel would have difficulty living with a nuclear-armed

7. National Intelligence Council, "U.S. National Intelligence Estimate: Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities," November 2007. Available online (www.dni.gov/press_releases/20071203_release.pdf).

8. U.S. House of Representatives, *Recognizing Iran as a Strategic Threat*.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

Iran and could take military action against Iranian nuclear facilities. A deliberate or miscalculated attack by one state on the other could result in retaliation, regional unrest, and an increase in terrorist attacks.

This analysis provides sufficient information to conclude that Iran poses a serious threat to U.S. national

security and to the security of its friends and allies, including Israel and U.S.-allied Arab governments. The United States has little insight into the Iranian regime, and Iran's government is determined to acquire nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons; support terrorism; and undermine political stability in Iraq.

How to Understand the Iran Threat after the 2007 National Intelligence Estimate

The National Intelligence Estimate (NIE)¹ on Iranian nuclear intentions and capabilities released in December 2007 does not alter the conclusions and analysis of this paper. Although the political fallout based on the key judgments complicates U.S. diplomatic and economic initiatives aimed at Iran, press reports badly misinterpreted the uncertainty inherent in the NIE. The NIE states with high confidence that Iran's weapons program was suspended in 2003 but with only medium confidence that it remains halted. The NIE judges that the halt was primarily in response to increasing international scrutiny and pressure resulting from exposure of Iran's previously undeclared nuclear work. Iran may be developing a nuclear capability that will not only provide nuclear energy but also ensure a latent deterrent capability that would enable it to build a weapon if required (for example, as Japan and Brazil have done²). The U.S. government should continue to encourage key allies to be careful not to overinterpret the NIE. The estimate does not appear to have sufficient specific intelligence to confirm or deny a covert program.

In noting that "the U.S. intelligence community has a poor track record regarding nuclear weapons programs, making incorrect judgments on some of the most important proliferation cases," the Washington

Institute's Patrick Clawson goes on to state that "there is a pattern here . . . a charitable interpretation would be that nuclear programs are difficult to assess."³ U.S. intelligence agencies failed to detect Israel's budding program in the 1960s; South Africa's weapons program in the 1970s; and the Libyan, North Korean, and Indian programs in the 1990s. No reason exists to believe that the intelligence community is now correctly assessing the current state of Iranian research and weapons development, given acknowledged U.S. intelligence gaps in that country.

Whether Iran is pursuing a nuclear weapon, or just the capability to build one (which the NIE acknowledges may be the case), Iran's malicious intentions toward the United States and its allies have not changed. Iran continues to threaten Israel with destruction; Iran continues to finance terrorist groups throughout the Middle East; Iran continues to target and kill U.S. troops in Iraq directly and through proxies; Iran continues a largely unrequited twenty-nine-year war against the United States in which thousands of American citizens and military personnel have been killed; and Iran continues to defy the United Nations and the international community by its acknowledged enrichment activities.

1. Available online (www.dni.gov/press_releases/20071203_release.pdf).

2. For additional information, see www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/brazil/nuke.htm; www.fas.org/nuke/guide/japan/nuke/.

3. Patrick Clawson, "How Much Does Weaponization Matter? Judging Iran's Nuclear Program," *Policy Watch* no. 1313 (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, December 4, 2007).

A New Strategic Alignment

THE SPECTER OF a nuclear-armed Iranian regime, committed (according to its own statements) to the destruction of Israel and the initiation of a renewed Jewish Holocaust does not require extensive or nuanced explanation.¹ As RAND Corporation's David Ochmanek points out, "A nuclear-armed Iran is likely to demonstrate more risky and assertive behavior—particularly in areas like terrorism—and significantly increase the risks for escalation, even if unintended." Hence, many experts agree that maintaining a stable deterrence relationship with Iran would prove far more difficult than the U.S.-Soviet experience in the Cold War.² An ideologically expansionist, nuclear-emboldened Iran also clearly represents a threat to the energy-rich, Sunni-ruled Gulf nations. Iran is already expanding its claims to oil and natural gas fields in the Gulf and the Caspian Sea, and a more assertive foreign policy will almost certainly follow Iran's mastery of the nuclear fuel cycle.

This situation has led to what Secretary of State Rice describes as "a new strategic alignment" in the Middle East—an alignment of the United States and those governments with a desire to strengthen peace and stability against those who support violent extremism, specifically, Syria and Iran. This postulated pro-peace and stability grouping consists of Turkey, Israel, Egypt, Jordan, and the countries forming the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC): Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), along with the leaders of Lebanon, the Palestinian Authority, and Iraq.³ Although the future efficacy of this strategic convergence in confronting Iran is in some doubt, the underlying Iranian threat to regional stability is not.⁴

To help buttress this "new strategic alignment," some analysts and policymakers have suggested that the United States might offer a set of formal security guarantees. A prospective declaratory policy (or policies) would affirm U.S. commitments to defend both Israel and America's Gulf partners against aggression or, specifically, against nuclear attack. This commitment could build regional confidence and undermine Iran's rationale for pursuing nuclear weapons. A number of options exist of the types of guarantees the United States could provide within the construct of a declaratory policy; each has its own pros and cons. For example, would Washington want only a general declaratory policy derived from consistent statements by senior government officials or a more formal policy endorsed by a presidential statement? Alternatively, should the United States provide bilateral or multilateral security guarantees that could range from private assurances to public agreements? Finally, would the security guarantees be provided by the United States alone, or would outside parties—such as NATO, the EU3 (United Kingdom, France, and Germany), the P5 (Britain, China, France, Russia, and the United States), or other regional groupings—be included in the arrangement? Although further discussion of U.S. declaratory policy is beyond the scope of this paper, the notion of coupling a public commitment to Israel's security with a similar commitment to other states in region would likely be contentious. It raises a number of issues that would have to be addressed to the satisfaction of all concerned prior to policy execution.

Buttressing this regional realignment are reports that Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert appears to

1. For a more complete treatment of the Iranian threat to Israel and the broader Middle East, see William Wunderle and Andre Briere, "Uncertain Future: A Strategic Review of the Middle East and Implications for the United States," *Comparative Strategy* 26, no. 3, 205–214.
2. RAND Public Policy Forum "Coping with Iran: Confrontation, Containment or Engagement?" (conference summary, Washington, D.C., March 21, 2007). Available online (www.rand.org/events/2007/03/21/).
3. "Congressional Testimony of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, The New Way Forward in Iraq, Submitted for the Record to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Thursday, January 11, 2007." Available online (www.senate.gov/~foreign/testimony/2007/RiceTestimony070111.pdf).
4. See, for example, Dr. Christopher Hemmer, "Responding to a Nuclear Iran," *Parameters* 37, no. 3 (Autumn 2007). See also Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America* (New York: Random House, 2004), p. 261.

be considering a strategic partnership with some Arab states based on the recently announced Saudi initiative (mirroring the 2002 Saudi proposal) that encourages Arab countries to recognize and make peace with Israel.⁵ The new Annapolis round of Middle East peace talks sponsored by the United States also holds some promise of cementing Israeli-Arab rapprochement. For the first time, Israel and the Arab Middle East find themselves unlikely allies because of their mutual distrust of Iran. This shared threat perspective (which exists, even if it remains unacknowledged) could potentially grow into the first line of defense and deterrence for the United States against Iran.

To help strengthen this tenuous coalition,⁶ strengthen bilateral relationships, enhance regional interoperability, and improve the ability of U.S. partners to protect their people, sovereignty, and security,⁷ the U.S. government initiated the Gulf Security Dialogue (GSD). The GSD is a diplomatic effort that reaffirms the U.S. commitment to protect vital shared interests in the region and focuses on arms sales and other forms of assistance, which include improving port security and protecting the key energy infrastructure of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, the UAE, Bahrain, and Oman.⁸ The stated purpose of these weapons sales is to enhance U.S. Gulf partners' capability to defend against and deter Iranian aggression;⁹ more important, foreign military sales are a symbol of Washington's long-standing commitment to U.S. allies in the Middle East region.¹⁰

In fact, positive indicators suggest that the GSD is bearing some fruit. Iranian threats have facilitated U.S. GSD goals. Particularly noteworthy are recent Iranian statements promising to retaliate against any U.S. attack by firing missiles at American bases in the region—most of which are located in GCC countries—whether American attacks were to emanate from those countries or not. Those assertions have had the effect of further uniting Arab countries with the United States against Iran.¹¹ According to the Saudi News Agency, the Saudi chief of the general staff General Saleh al-Mehaya commented, “The security of the GCC and protection of its resources can only be achieved through a unified military strategy.” Such a unified strategy could be accomplished only through close coordination and full integration with the United States.¹² A failure of this strategic partnership to mature would further embolden Iran as a destabilizing force in the Middle East and enable it to undermine U.S. interests in a variety of spheres.¹³ These changing dynamics call for reassessing how the U.S. government looks at QME.

At present, no Arab state appears eager to launch a war against Israel. Iraq is no longer a threat. Syria suffers from aging equipment and a limited air force capability,¹⁴ and the Middle East peace process has, for all practical purposes, eliminated Jordan and Egypt as viable military threats to Israel. That being said, Israel is facing a limited but growing asymmetric threat from organized terrorist units, long-range surface-to-surface

5. Matthew Fisher, “Rice Floats Idea of Middle-East Super Summit,” Canada.com, March 27, 2007. Available online (www.canada.com/topics/news/world/story.html?id=c2585ae2-683f-4341-8e1e-388c3368505b&k=46528).

6. The coalition is designed to contain Iranian influence and bolster regional defenses and deterrent capabilities.

7. Rice, “Testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs,” October 24, 2007.

8. Farah Stockman, “U.S. Looks to Sell Arms in Gulf to Try to Contain Iran: Congressional OK Needed,” *Boston Globe*, March 21, 2007. Available online (www.boston.com/news/nation/articles/2007/03/21/us_looks_to_sell_arms_in_gulf_to_try_to_contain_iran/). See also Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, “Interview with Reuters,” Washington, D.C., December 16, 2006 (available online at www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/77908.htm), and Representative Jim Saxton, “Reshaping Our Iran Policy,” *National Interest*, January 3, 2007 (available online at www.nationalinterest.org/Article.aspx?id=13284).

9. Although this proposition is debatable, prominent U.S. decisionmakers repeatedly make this point in public statements and congressional testimony.

10. Rice, “Testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs,” October 24, 2007.

11. In October 1987, the GCC agreed on a mutual defense pact whereby an attack on any Member State would be construed as an attack on all Member States. In addition, both Kuwait and Qatar have signed defense pacts with the United States. The 1992 defense pact Qatar signed with the United States was renewed in 2002. Likewise, the 1991 ten-year defense pact Kuwait signed with the United States was renewed in 2002.

12. Riad Kahwaji, “Iranian Threat Drives GCC Military Plans,” *Defense News*, November 5, 2007. Available online (<http://www.dnmgconferences.com/dubaiconf/3173713.html> www.defensenews.com).

13. Dalia Dassa Kaye, “A Strategy for Iran,” United Press International, February 10, 2006.

14. Lt. Col. Stephen H. Gotowicki, “Considering a U.S. Military Force on the Golan: Confronting Hyperbole, Paranoia, Hysteria, and Agendas,” Foreign Military Studies Office, U.S. Army, May 8, 1996, p. 9.

missiles, and WMD.¹⁵ Although Hizballah's perceived victory in the summer of 2006 could encourage potential Arab adversaries (such as Syria) to accelerate development of the asymmetric warfare capabilities mentioned, conventional war is extremely unlikely in the near to mid term.

In effect, the budding strategic realignment in the region, the war in Iraq, and the deterioration of certain of its adversaries' military capabilities have combined to eliminate or dramatically reduce all of the traditional threats to Israel except one: an aggressive Iranian state that is seeking nuclear capabilities and actively supporting the termination of Israel as a state.¹⁶

Despite this seemingly improved threat environment, Israel does have concerns about long-term regime stability in Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. These future concerns, however, cannot drive U.S. policy or weapons sale decisions for obvious reasons. The United States is hard pressed to address immediate, high-priority threats to itself and its allies; it cannot afford to make funding decisions based upon conjecture and future scenarios of uncertain likelihood, particularly if those decisions threaten to undermine its more immediate objectives. This is particularly true given the U.S. ability (and demonstrated bipartisan willingness) to mitigate the risks posed by Israeli concerns over long-term stability in the region.¹⁷

Although Israeli concerns about regime change in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan may seem self-serving and exaggerated to many Western policymakers and analysts, future threats are an important consideration when discussing QME. What are the likely Arab threat

scenarios from Israel's perspective? The most commonly raised concern is that Egypt's president Hosni Mubarak will die in office without a clear line of succession and that Islamists might take this opportunity to seize power. In this scenario, Egypt's vast U.S.-supplied military arsenal would be turned on Israel, and open hostilities could erupt. Israeli government officials and analysts also point to similar possible situations wherein the current governments of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon might fall to internal or external Islamist forces and those countries could again pose an imminent threat. Although a full treatment of these scenarios is beyond the scope of this paper, all of these postulated threats are equally unlikely (at least in the short to mid term) from a U.S. perspective.¹⁸

Despite clear military advantages over neighboring Arab states, Israeli officials will likely continue to object to the U.S. sale of advanced weapons to its (and, tacitly, Israeli) regional partners because of a perceived erosion of Israel's qualitative edge and threat scenarios as described. By the Israeli definition of QME, Israel is correct: any weapons release to an Arab country adversely affects Israel's QME. This situation makes adoption of a shared U.S.-Israeli definition all the more urgent.

Nevertheless, signs exist that Israel is beginning to take a more pragmatic stance with regard to U.S. arms sales to its Arab allies. In an effort to strengthen Israel, Egypt, and the Gulf states militarily against Iran, the U.S. government announced in July 2007 its decision to sell arms simultaneously to Israel and seven Arab countries: Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain,

15. Israel retains its advantage in space reconnaissance, long-range missiles, nuclear weapons, and antitactical ballistic missiles, which are all part of Israel's deterrence strategy.

16. The Syrian WMD or missile threat is certainly significant, but Iran poses a much greater threat for reasons discussed in this paper. Syrian conventional capabilities since the fall of the Soviet Union have steadily degraded and do not represent a significant offensive danger to Israel in the policy-relevant future.

17. When advocating its "foreseeable" threat definition of QME, Israel often points to the possibility of a radical Islamist regime in Egypt. The government of Israel also bases requests for additional funding on this scenario.

18. Jeffrey Azarva, "From Cold Peace to Cold War? The Significance of Egypt's Military Buildup," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 11, no. 1 (March 2007). Since the 1978 Camp David peace accords, Egypt has received approximately \$60 billion in direct U.S. military and economic aid. Under the terms of the agreement (as well as subsequent subordinate arrangements), Egypt has used its \$1.3 billion annual military aid to completely reequip its military with U.S. and Western-origin weapons systems and training. Most analysts agree that despite this assistance, Egypt's military has failed to exploit "its Western platforms, technology and combat doctrine and poses virtually no threat to Israel." An annual study from Tel Aviv University's Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies asserts that Egypt continues to operate under Soviet-era doctrine and intelligence models that would cripple it in any future conflict with Israel. See Shlomo Brom and Yiftah S. Shapir, eds., *The Middle East Strategic Balance 2003-2004* (Brighton, U.K. and Portland, Ore.: Sussex Academic Press, The Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 2004), p. 97. See also, "Egypt's Military Poses Little Threat to Israel," *Middle East Newline* 6, no. 378, October 12, 2004.

Oman, and the UAE. This package includes \$20 billion to Saudi Arabia and others in the GCC, \$13 billion to Egypt, and \$30 billion to Israel.¹⁹ Notably, Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert has not publicly objected to these sales, stating that Israel acknowledges the need for the United States to support Arab states opposed to Iran. But Israel is still using its influence in Congress to suggest limits to the package, such as restricting deployment of certain systems to the immediate Gulf region and eliminating specific precision systems from the sale.²⁰ In light of these recent developments, the issue of QME in the context of a new strategic alignment is becoming even more critical. Toward this end,

the authors propose the following joint U.S.-Israeli definition of QME:

Israel's qualitative military edge ensures its ability to defend itself against any likely combination of regional forces in the foreseeable future. QME will be determined through a holistic analysis of the current political-military environment; U.S. and Israeli foreign policy interests; U.S. and foreign-supplied weapons systems; the manpower, training, leadership, and tactical capability of Israel's military relative to those of its potential adversaries; and indigenous development of military systems. These factors will be measured against any likely combination of hostile force capabilities and mitigating factors.

19. Thalif Dean, "U.S. Arms Sales Preserve Israel's Edge," Inter Press Service News Agency, August 3, 2007. Available online (<http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=38791>).

20. Steven Erlanger, "Israel to Get \$30 Billion in Military Aid from U.S." *New York Times*, August 17, 2007.

If Not Us . . .

WHAT IF THE UNITED STATES does not supply weapons to Middle Eastern states? What would be the likely effect if the United States accedes to Israeli pressures not to counterbalance the Iranian threat and aggression with arms sales to Arab allies? Increased instability is the likely result, with more sectarian strife in Iraq and uncertainty in Lebanon and the Gulf. With an emboldened Iran fueling instability, many Middle Eastern countries will spend more on high-tech arms from external suppliers while accelerating their indigenous capabilities to develop and produce rockets, missiles, and other weaponry.¹

In the absence of U.S. weapons systems, a number of countries, including Russia, China, France, and the United Kingdom, will fill the gap and sell their wares to Arab nations—sales that will be made without the guidance of QME concerns.² For example, in 2006, Saudi Arabia signed a memorandum of understanding with the British government to purchase 72 Typhoon multirole jet fighters worth approximately \$21.2 billion, and it is negotiating with Russia to buy 150 T-90 tanks worth at least \$1 billion. The UAE air force is expected to decide early in 2008 on an aerial electronic warfare and early-warning platform, a deal expected to be worth about \$1 billion.³ Nevertheless, Washington's regional partners clearly prefer U.S. equipment.⁴

If the United States loses these sales, it also stands to lose such intangibles as leverage and senior leader

access, as well as counterproliferation influence and procurement savings inherent in each sale—not to mention the improved interoperability supporting U.S. policy objectives in the region. In the past, the bilateral relationships forged through weapons sales and security cooperation have led to increased basing rights,⁵ pre-positioning of equipment, and access to port facilities, as well as to support for Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and the global war on terrorism. The case of Saudi Arabia proves illustrative.

As Saudi Arabia's largest military partner, the United States enjoys considerable influence with the Saudi military leadership. Saudi military officers and their families come to the United States for training, and the long-standing relationships developed give this country considerable insight into the Saudis' thinking and influence into their decisionmaking, both of which would be diminished as other countries replace the United States in that role. For instance, if the United States does not sell the Littoral Combat Ship⁶ to Saudi Arabia, Washington would likely have to wait twenty to thirty years (the life cycle of a typical naval weapons system) until it had another opportunity to regain lost influence with the Royal Saudi Naval Forces.

The United States is committed to maintaining strong relationships with its historical partners in the region—including Saudi Arabia. Arms sales are

1. Israel, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, in descending order, are the largest recipients of U.S. weapons in the region. While Saudi Arabia and the rest of the countries in the Gulf region pay for their arms from the United States, both Egypt and Israel purchase most of their arms through U.S.-provided grants. Although Egypt does purchase most of its weapons from the United States, it also spends millions of dollars each year on weapons from other sources. From 2003 to 2006, the value of Egyptian agreements for U.S. arms was \$4.3 billion, while the value of agreements for Russian, Chinese, and European arms totaled over \$1.3 billion for the same period. See Richard F. Grimmett, "Congressional Research Service Report for Congress: Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations, 1999–2006," Order Code RL34187, September 26, 2007. Available online (www.fas.org/sgp/crs/weapons/RL34187.pdf).

2. Barbara Opall and Riad Kahwaji, "Mideast Dangers Drive Accelerated Spending," *Defense News*, March 12, 2007. Available online (www.defensenews.com/story.php?F=2601227&C=mideast).

3. Ibid.

4. The sixteen Longbows purchased by Kuwait in 2002 for \$1.2 billion are currently being delivered by Boeing, while the Kuwaiti air force is looking to upgrade its fleet of F/A-18 Hornets and possibly buy another squadron of Super Hornets. Furthermore, Boeing is actively engaged in marketing the F/A-18 Super Hornet Block 2 and the F-15S Super Eagle in the region.

5. They historically have granted at least temporary basing rights. For the most part, America's Arab allies have been hesitant to host U.S. military forces on a long-term basis. When the United States exerts pressure for access and basing rights during a crisis (as was the case during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, or Northern/Southern Watch), most of these nations acquiesce.

6. "The USA's New Littoral Combat Ships (updated)," *Defense Industry Daily*, November 4, 2007. Available online (www.defenseindustrydaily.com/2006/12/the-usas-new-littoral-combat-ships-updated/index.php).

powerful political and military signals of U.S. intentions to stand by its longtime allies in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia would perceive U.S. withholding of these sales as indicating less than full commitment to Saudi defense. Consequently, the United States would begin to lose political and military influence, in addition to losing access to senior Saudi leadership. Currently, two U.S. general officers serve as military advisors to the Ministry of Defense and Aviation and the Saudi Arabian National Guard (SANG) and thus have direct access to the crown prince and king, respectively. If another country (likely Russia) replaces the United States as the principal source of military hardware and training, the current levels of access and influence afforded to it would be lost. Additionally, the U.S. gains enhanced interoperability with the Saudi Arabian armed forces and the SANG through the sales of arms compatible with U.S. weapons systems and from Saudi participation in selected military exercises and related education and training activities. Moreover, the

United States retains continued leverage from fielded systems because it supplies repair parts, technical assistance, and future upgrades.

The United States is far more likely to limit weapons sales to less capable export variants or smaller quantities than other exporting nations. For example, the recently delivered AMRAAM (advanced medium-range air-to-air missiles) for the Saudi Arabian air force are less capable than the NATO-standard version provided to Israel. Precision targeting systems such as the Harpoon II and Joint Direct Attack Munitions depend on U.S.-supplied software, which could be cut off if necessary. This might not be the case in sales from Russia, France, or China.

Furthermore, the sales of weapons and technology to America's regional partners has directly benefited U.S. economic interests by creating jobs, sustaining the military-industrial base, reducing procurement costs for weapons systems to the U.S. military, providing technology spin-offs, and injecting billions of dollars into the U.S. economy.⁷

7. For example, the production of the UAE F-16 employs approximately 45,000 people in more than forty states, and the cost of the U.S. Littoral Combat Ship program could be reduced by 5 percent (\$750 million to \$1 billion) with a \$15 billion to \$20 billion sale to Saudi Arabia. See Lt. Col. Robert C. Dooley, USAF, "The F-16 Block 60 Sale to the United Arab Emirates: Was the Horse Let Out of the Barn?" National Defense University, 2004. Available online from U.S. military and government addresses (www.ndu.edu/nwc/writing/AY04/5603/5603%20Best%20Paper--Seminar%20L.pdf).

Policy Recommendations

THIS PAPER HAS REVIEWED the historical basis for QME, pointed out definitional divergence between the United States and Israel, outlined the increased regional threat from Iran, and emphasized the urgency of a joint U.S.-Israeli vision for U.S. weapons sales and assistance in the region to deter and contain Iran. Our policy recommendations in light of the current regional realignment are simple and, the authors hope, not very controversial.

First, the United States and Israel must conduct a joint strategic assessment of the current security environment in the broader Middle East and North Africa. On the basis of this assessment, Israel would acknowledge that Sunni Arab Gulf nations are extremely unlikely to attack Israel or join in a coalition to wage a conventional war against her. Israel's concerns about future regime change in Saudi Arabia and Egypt are understandable and would be acknowledged, but weighed against the very real and present threat posed by Iran. Furthermore, the interagency should assess on an annual basis what "likely" combination of regional conventional forces could threaten Israel in the next seven years.

Second, Israel must cease its legitimate but misguided opposition to U.S. government weapons sales to its Arab Gulf allies. Iran poses an existential threat to Israel. The government of Israel needs to acknowledge that the United States and Israel will require well-armed Arab allies in confronting and containing the Iranian regime. It is preferable to both Israel and the United States that the Gulf nations modernize their forces with U.S. equipment and assistance rather than forcing them to look to Russia and China for those arms. Finally, the United States and Israel must agree on a joint definition of QME and infuse this definition with rigorous joint analysis.

Specific Recommendations

As previously stated, because of the impossibility of a quantitative military edge over a hypothetical unified Arab-Iranian alliance, Israel must rely on its qualitative edge. To date, the determination of Israel's qualitative military edge is fundamentally a political issue. The U.S. government must establish an interagency process to analyze U.S. arms sales to its regional partners while maintaining Israel's QME.

Developing an Analytical Framework

In proposing an analytical framework for QME analysis, we find reviewing the assumptions established so far in this paper useful. First, Israel's QME is the backbone of its concept of national security. Second, the United States has pledged to assist Israel in retaining its qualitative edge, ensuring Israel will have the ability to defend itself against any likely combination of regional conventional forces. Finally, Israel faces fewer conventional military threats than at any time in its history.¹

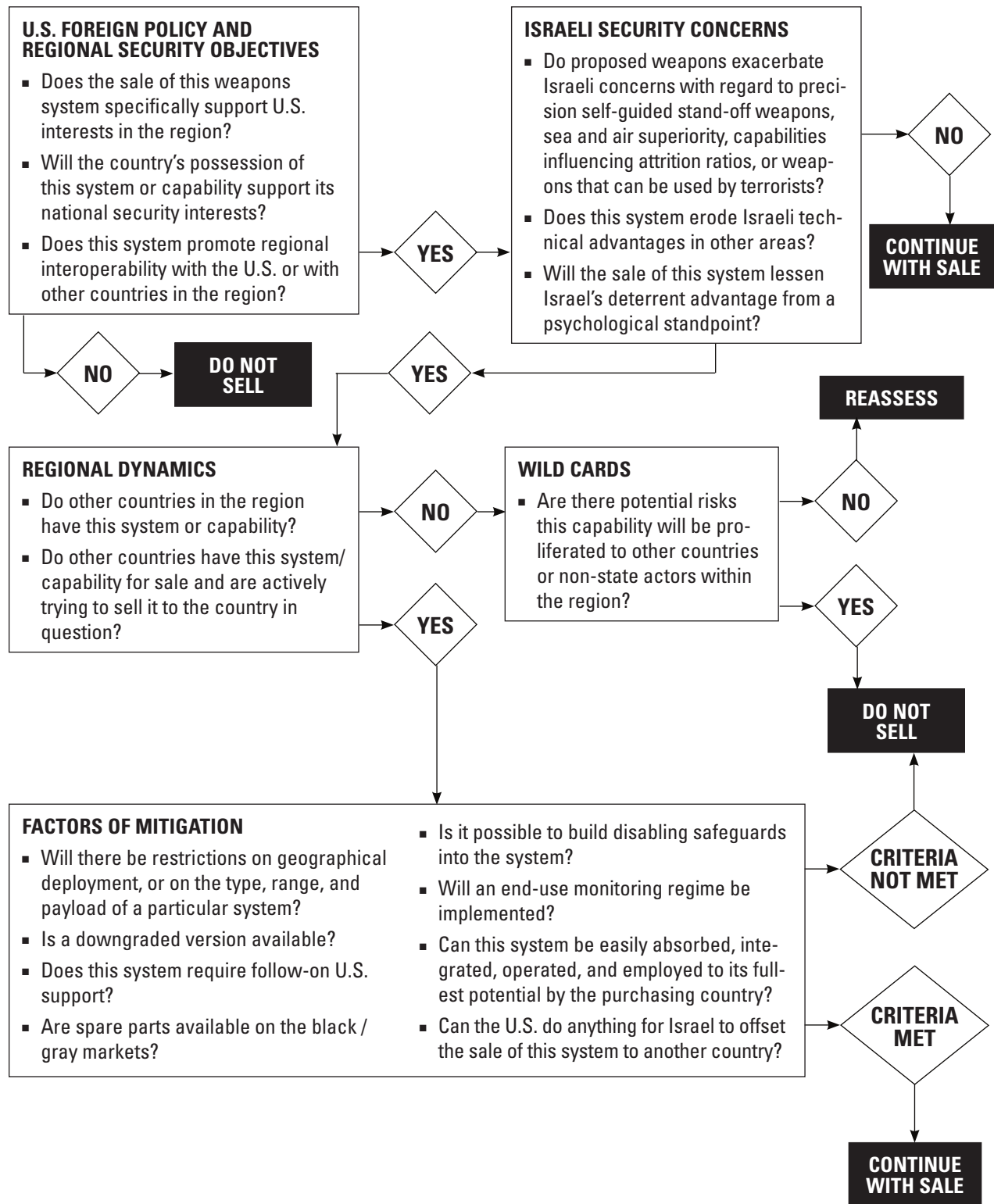
These assumptions address Israeli's conventional QME, but the Iranian nuclear and unconventional threats (through its terrorist proxies) loom large in Jerusalem's current threat calculus. These changing dynamics call for reassessing how both the United States and Israel look at QME. One possible way of assessing Israeli QME with regard to future weapons sales to the region is what we call "A Regional Security-Based Approach."

Figure 1 (next page) represents a possible "decision tree" tool for U.S. analysts when considering weapons sales to Middle Eastern nations. Amazingly, no such tool exists at present in U.S. policymaking circles.

This tool uses a holistic approach to analyze each proposed arms sale or groups of sales against set criteria. These include U.S. foreign policy and regional security objectives, Israeli security concerns, regional dynamics, factors of mitigation, and wild cards.

1. Asymmetrical threats and terrorist attacks are likely to remain Israel's most pressing day-to-day concern. Israel's QME will probably not be capable of neutralizing the threats from terrorism and low-intensity conflict, and Israel will continue to face difficulty in countering the growing sophistication of terrorist attacks.

Figure 1. QME Determination Process



U.S. Foreign Policy and Regional Security Objectives

In considering a government's request for the sale of a specific weapons system, analysts must determine the following:

- The sale of this weapons system specifically supports U.S. interests in the region, which includes bolstering regional alliances while deterring radical regimes such as Iran and Syria.
- The country's strategic framework within the region justifies the sale.
- The country's possession of this system or capability supports its own national security interests
- The system promotes interoperability with the United States or with other countries in the region.

If the answers to these questions are "no," the request for the weapons sale would be denied. If the answers are "yes," the arms sale would be addressed against Israeli concerns.

Israeli Security Concerns

Next, analysts would determine whether the proposed weapons negate Israeli concerns. Further analysis would be conducted to determine if the proposed system would erode Israeli technical advantages in other areas, including armor, self-propelled artillery, targeting and counterbattery systems, air intercept and strike aircraft, attack helicopters, unmanned aerial vehicles, standoff precision guided air-to-ground munitions, surface-to-air missiles, anti-ship missiles, ballistic missiles, and theater ballistic missile defense. Finally, the analyst would assess whether the sale of this system would lessen Israel's deterrent advantage from a psychological

standpoint. If the answers are "no," the arms sale would be approved. If the answer to any of these questions is "yes," the request for the weapons sale would be analyzed in the context of regional dynamics.

Regional Dynamics

A strategic analysis of the dynamics of the region would further address whether other countries in the Middle East already have this system or capability or if other nations (China, France, Russia, United Kingdom) with this system or capability for sale are actively trying to sell it to the country in question. If the answers are "no," analysts would consider the wild-card scenarios—the risks that this capability would be proliferated to other countries or nonstate actors within the region—along with the U.S. ability to indirectly influence or maintain leverage with the country through training, spare parts sales, and the like to outweigh those risks. If the answer to any of these questions is "yes," the request for the weapons sale would be analyzed against a number of mitigating factors.

Factors of Mitigation

As previously stated, the United States has often sold downgraded weapon systems to Arab states and upgraded versions to Israel, or it has sold "balancing" weapons packages to the Israelis whenever a major deal was concluded with Saudi Arabia or other Middle Eastern nations. Similarly, in using this tool, analysts would determine whether a downgraded version of the weapon were available and, if so, in what areas, and if the United States could or should do anything for Israel to offset the sale of this system to another country.² Analysis would also determine whether the system requires follow-on U.S. support, as well as the availability of spare parts on the black and gray markets, and how the United States could build disabling safeguards into the system or mitigate its technical capabilities.

2. For example, when the United States sold M60A3 and M1A1 Abrams battle tanks to Egypt, it sold TOW 2A and Hellfire antitank missiles to Israel. Furthermore, when the United States sold McDonnell Douglas fighter planes to Saudi Arabia, it sold Sidewinder and Sparrow air-to-air missiles and Hawk and Stinger surface-to-air missiles to Israel. See John Kifner, "Confrontation in the Gulf; Israelis, Irked by Arms Sale to Saudis, Ask More of U.S.," *New York Times*, September 17, 1990. Available online (<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C0CE6DA113EF934A2575AC0A966958260>). See also, Nicholas Kravov, "U.S. Offers Arms, Aid for Mideast Military Balance," *Washington Times*, July 31, 2007. Available online (www.washingtontimes.com/article/20070731/FOREIGN/107310047/1003).

These possibilities include withholding maintenance, satellites, software upgrades, Global Positioning System (GPS)³ and guidance cryptographic codes such as the Selective Availability/Anti-Spoofing Module (SAASM),⁴ or digital imagery enhancement techniques. If deemed necessary, the United States could place additional restrictions on the weapons systems through strict end-use monitoring regimes⁵ (including surprise inspections) that could restrict geographical deployment or the type, range, and payload of a particular system.⁶ Finally, analysts would determine if the weapons system could be easily absorbed, integrated, operated, or employed to its fullest potential by the purchasing country (readiness, training, battle management, and doctrine).

If the sale meets these criteria, then analysts would consider to what degree the weapons system would erode advantages in less-tangible areas of military effectiveness. These include overall quality of military training, readiness levels, leadership, personnel, battlefield management, logistics support, intelligence collection and dissemination, advanced Western tactics

and realistic training, and an emphasis on a Western-style offensive doctrine of combined arms warfare; all-weather and nighttime combat; command and control; as well as computers, communications and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance collection and dissemination systems. The request for the weapons sale would be approved or denied based on this analysis.

This decision tree tool is just one example of a number of ways in which the interagency process could analyze U.S. arms sales to its regional partners while maintaining Israel's qualitative military edge. Other methods could include a capabilities-based approach using a Doctrinal, Organizational, Training, Materiel, Leadership, Personnel, and Facilities (DOTMLPF) methodology⁷ to analyze Israel and likely combinations of its regional adversaries, or the U.S. government could sponsor a series of war games, using simulations to analyze the effects of arms sales on Israeli QME.⁸ No matter which methodology is ultimately used, it must initially view Israeli QME through the lens of U.S. strategic interests and foreign policy objectives in the region.

3. The Global Positioning System is a satellite-based navigation system made up of a network of twenty-four satellites placed into orbit by the U.S. Department of Defense. GPS was originally intended for military applications, but in the 1980s, the government made the system available for civilian use. GPS works in any weather conditions, anywhere in the world, twenty-four hours a day.
4. A Selective Availability/Anti-Spoofing Module is used by military GPS receivers to allow decryption of precision GPS coordinates; the accuracy of civilian GPS receivers may be reduced by the U.S. military through Selective Availability. SAASM allows satellite authentication, over-the-air rekeying, and contingency recovery. SAASM systems can be updated with an encrypted "Black Key" that may be transmitted over unclassified channels. All military receivers that will be newly deployed after the end of September 2006 must use SAASM. See "Why Convert to a SAASM Based Global Positioning System," Symmetricon Application Note. Available online (www.mil-embedded.com/articles/holm).
5. Section 40A of the *Arms Export Control Act* (AECA) describes the Department of State's responsibility to implement end-use monitoring of commercial export of defense articles, services, and related technical data subject to licensing under section 38 of the AECA. The Office of Defense Trade Controls (DTC), in the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, Department of State, is responsible for administering the International Traffic in Arms Regulations that implement the AECA. DTC's functions include registering manufacturers, brokers, and exporters; licensing commercial defense trade; overseeing company compliance with U.S. export regulations; supporting U.S. law enforcement agencies in criminal investigations and prosecutions; and, finally, the end-use monitoring of licensed transactions. See "End-Use Monitoring of Defense Articles and Defense Services Commercial Exports," Department of State. Available online (www.pmdtc.state.gov/docs/End_Use_FY2002.pdf).
6. See Ron Kampeas, "Dems, Pro-Israel Groups Want More Info on Arms Sale to Saudis," UJA Federation of New York Daily Briefing, July 31, 2007. Available online (www.ujafedny.org/site/c.ggLU10OzGpF/b.3052967/k.E62D/Daily_Briefing_73107.htm).
7. Military capabilities consist of more than materiel considerations. The DOTMLP process is the way capability gaps are addressed through nonmateriel approaches. Adaptive and determined leadership, innovative concept development and experimentation, and lessons learned from recent operations produce corresponding changes to doctrine, organizations, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, and facilities. DOTMLPF is a problem-solving construct for assessing current capabilities and managing change. Change deliberately executed across DOTMLPF elements can enable Israel to improve its capabilities to remain the dominant power in the region. See FM 1, *The Army*, Headquarters, Department of the Army, Washington, DC, June 14, 2005, Para 4-11.
8. These simulations use investigative/causative or deterministic/process flow modeling to help correlate how minute changes in a system affect the behavior of the entire system. Examples include SAIC's situation intuitive assessment model (SAIM), a decisionmaking tool that breaks down complex issues so that important relationships can be recognized and evaluated, and the Institute of Electrical Engineers' STELLA Model, a dynamic simulation model that allows one to perform qualitative analysis of a system and to represent the cause-and-effect relationships between activities.

Conclusion

WHAT WE CALL FOR in this paper is a paradigm shift not only in the way that the United States conceives of and thinks about QME but, more important, also in the way that Washington analyzes U.S. commitment to, and support of, Israel's QME as a tool to implement broader U.S. foreign policy objectives in the region. For Israel, maintenance of its QME is an end in itself, inextricably linked to its very survival; but for the United States, it is not. Rather, QME serves the broader goals of ensuring the survival of America's strongest ally in this geopolitical hot spot and of providing tangible evidence to that ally of ongoing U.S. commitment, making it more likely that, going forward, Israel will act and take positions that conform to U.S. foreign policy goals in the region. Over time, however, U.S. understanding of and support for Israel's QME has become myopic. The United States has "lost the forest for the trees," and, in so doing, it risks undermining the broader goals driving that support in the first place.

First, by failing to clearly enunciate and come to common agreement with Israel regarding how its QME can and should be defined, the United States creates the risk that, from Israel's perspective, it is perceived as failing to support Israel's QME goals. At the same time, from the U.S. perspective and based on its definition, the United States is acting in support of Israel's QME goals. Therefore, a clear and common definition of QME is necessary for the United States to meet its goals of demonstrating to Israel ongoing U.S. commitment toward Israel's survival, as well as the commitment to U.S. Gulf partners to protect vital shared interests in the region. Alternatively, the United States and Israel should at least try to narrow definitional differences to the degree possible and come to agreement on risk-mitigation strategies.

Second, and more important, once the United States and Israel have arrived at a common definition of Israel's QME and how it can and should be maintained, the United States cannot let it become

a foreign policy goal in itself. The Arab states no longer pose the existential threat to Israel that they once did. Instead, they find themselves becoming more and more strategically aligned with Israel and the United States in their need and desire to contain and deter an increasingly aggressive Iranian government determined to assert itself as a hegemonic military-political presence in the region. Preventing that from occurring is and should remain the first-order goal of U.S. policy in the region—a goal that should, in turn, inform U.S. thinking and decisions about arms sales and other foreign policy decisions in the region that have implications for Israel's QME.

Finally, as the United States proceeds in the difficult "War on Terror," the authors hope that development and implementation of this clearer definition of Israel's QME will provide Washington with an opportunity—in conjunction with Israel—to gain a stronger toehold in the Arab imagination and begin to repair the American image in at least part of the Arab world. By supporting the Arab states with whom the United States and Israel are aligned, Washington not only bolsters Israel's QME over its greater potential adversaries (i.e., Iran and Syria) but also begins to regain the goodwill of those Arab states and their leaders. Although a complete analysis of this thesis is beyond the scope of this paper, it is our contention that that goodwill lies at the heart of any strategy to stem the tide of terrorism in the region.

The goal of preserving and developing Israel's relevant advantages in a very tough neighborhood remains unchanged, and U.S. commitment to Israel's QME should ensure Israel's ability to defend itself against any likely combination of regional forces in the foreseeable future. QME is a doctrine and tool designed to ensure Israel's continued survival. Nevertheless, it is in neither the U.S. nor Israel's interest to allow misapplication of QME to hamper their combined response to the very real threat of Iran's aggressive foreign policy, hegemonic aspirations, and terror.

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