

# The U.S. Role in Addressing New Threats to Israel: Progress and Pitfalls

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**Israel's deterrent power is largely a reflection of how its adversaries view the strength of its strategic relationship with the United States, so actively addressing the issues that have caused recent fissures is paramount.**

**T**he following is an excerpt from Mr. Makovsky's prepared remarks, as submitted for the hearing "Israel Imperiled: Threats to the Jewish State," a joint meeting held by the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade and the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa. To read his full testimony, [download the PDF](#).

Between 1948 and 1973, the Arab-Israel conflict witnessed several state-to-state wars between neighbors. At least in those wars, states had rules of warfare. In contrast, today Israel is encircled largely by nonstate actors, which have no rules. They do not accept that Israel has a right to exist within any boundaries and, critically, they aim to set the front line inside Israel's urban areas. They have no problem with embedding themselves in the heart of urban areas, firing rockets into Israeli cities, and, in so doing, challenging Israel to retaliate in terrain that could lead to greater civilian casualties on the Palestinian side.

On five of Israel's borders, Israel is facing nonstate actors. First, in Lebanon, the dominant nonstate actor is Hezbollah, which is believed to have 150,000 rockets. Second, along the Syrian border, where Syrian soldiers and UN peacekeepers once stood, there is now Jabhat al-Nusra, an offshoot of al-Qaeda. This does not even count the Islamic State, which is in eastern Syria and has openly threatened Jordan, a key Israeli ally. Third, on the Egyptian front in the south, an ISIS affiliate has wreaked havoc in the Sinai, territory ostensibly under Egyptian control since the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. This group is also trying to make inroads with Hamas in Gaza.

Fourth, there is Hamas in Gaza, which has fought three wars with Israel in the last seven-plus years, using the same formula of firing rockets at Israeli urban areas. The most recent war in 2014 lasted a full 51 days, and civilians on

both sides were impacted. Israelis had mere seconds to head for cover, hoping that Iron Dome missile defense debris would not land on their heads. Palestinian civilians also suffered tragic losses in relatively larger numbers due to Hamas' strategy of embedding fighters and weaponry in urban areas. And while today there is relative quiet along this front, it is only a matter of time before a fourth war begins in Gaza. Moreover, Hamas has resisted uniting Gaza under the Palestinian Authority. Needless to say, without U.S. military assistance writ large and without Iron Dome specifically, Israel's security predicament would be far worse.

A fifth border is a power-sharing arrangement with the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, which I will discuss below. The only border that resembles a classic state-to-state security relationship is that between Israel and Jordan. These are two states that have drawn much closer to each other in recent years amid shared threats and common interests.

Of course, beyond the challenges of its immediate neighbors, there is also Iran. Israel may not like the Iran deal, as we all know, but it understands it must now turn toward enhancing the U.S.-Israel bilateral security relationship. At a joint conference with Secretary of Defense Ash Carter in October, Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon said, "The Iran deal is a given...Our disputes are over. And now we have to look to the future." Israel's military chief of staff, Gadi Eizenkot, even argued recently that in the short term Israel is safer, given that the nuclear deal forces the Iranians to ship out their stockpile of enriched uranium and cut down many of their centrifuges.

Yet two sets of questions remain. One is about what will happen when the restrictions on Iranian enrichment and deployment of advanced centrifuges are lifted under the terms of the deal over the next 10-15 years. Israel questions Washington's resoluteness to address the myriad of implementation issues that could arise. It also questions U.S. willingness to ensure that Iran understands the consequences of dashing for the bomb, either during the agreement or after its main components expire. Second, in the more immediate sense, Israel worries that Iran is shedding its pariah status and will use access to post-sanctions capital to gain greater regional influence.

This rather sober assessment is punctuated by two rather unusual rays of light. First, despite the political impasse on peace negotiations since the collapse of Secretary of State John Kerry's initiative in 2014, Israeli-Palestinian security cooperation in the West Bank has, for the most part, been strong. Of course, nothing is ever easy and Palestinians control or partially control only 40 percent of the West Bank. There have been over 200 stabbings by Palestinians since October, many of them perpetuated by teenagers. While it is true that inflammatory statements by Mahmoud Abbas in the early days of this "lone wolf" stabbing wave exacerbated tensions, Israeli officials say PA security cooperation with Israel has been essential in ultimately reducing the violence. Israeli officials corroborate a statement by Palestinian intelligence chief Majid Faraj to *Defense News* in January that the Palestinian security services have stopped 200 additional attacks. They also corroborate a recent statement by Abbas that the Palestinian security services have gone into Palestinian schools and confiscated knives. It is also known that Palestinian plainclothes police have stayed on the Palestinian side of key checkpoints to confiscate more knives and stop even more attacks... ❖

*House Committee on Foreign Affairs*

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