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**ISRAEL'S ERODING EDGE
IN THE
MIDDLE EAST MILITARY BALANCE**

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PREFACE

The Middle East arms race presents a difficult challenge to American national interests. On the one hand, the United States is committed to maintaining Israel's qualitative edge in the military balance in order to deter Arab aggression and stabilize the Arab-Israeli conflict. On the other hand, successive U.S. administrations have felt it necessary to provide some Arab states with sophisticated weapons. In trying to balance these conflicting interests, the United States has managed to contribute to the escalation of the arms race.

The Reagan Administration is presently undertaking a review of its Middle East arms sales policy. For this reason, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy invited Ze'ev Schiff, Israel's foremost military correspondent, and a Senior Associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, to provide an Israeli perspective on this problem.

What Schiff's study reveals is a disturbing erosion of Israel's qualitative edge and an increasing likelihood of a Syrian-led war on Israel's eastern front. The supply of sophisticated American weapons to Jordan and Saudi Arabia, Schiff concludes, will only exacerbate these trends and leave Israel with some dire options. He suggests that the way out of America's dilemma is to sell strictly defensive weapons to Jordan and Saudi Arabia, assist Israel in redressing the eroding balance, and adhere to the principle of avoiding the sale of sophisticated weapons to countries still in a state of war with Israel.

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Barbi Weinberg
President
May 1985



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The supply of sophisticated American weapons to Arab states - particularly Jordan - is more disturbing to Israel in 1985 than ever before. This is because Israel's edge in the military balance is steadily eroding.

* The Arabs' quantitative advantage continues to grow as their armies garner strength while Israel's economic crisis forces the closing down of IDF operational units, including Air Force combat squadrons.

* Israel's qualitative advantage is slipping because the Arabs are systematically acquiring top quality weapons while Israel can no longer afford many of the weapons it needs to stay ahead and is forced to sharply reduce the training hours for combat pilots and tank crews.

* Israel's ability to deter Syria has been reduced because the Syrian army has expanded to eight highly mobile divisions and Damascus has acquired front-line Soviet equipment never before introduced into the Middle East (including 900 T-72 tanks, advanced MiG-23s and SU-22s, SA-5 long range anti-aircraft missiles, highly accurate SS-21 ground-to-ground missiles and long-range anti-ship missiles). Syria has also invested efforts in the development and production of a chemical warfare capability. In short, the Syrian army is reaching the point where it may well be prepared to initiate hostilities.

In this context, Israel is particularly concerned about the growth in the offensive capabilities of the Jordanian armed forces. In the absence of peace with Jordan, Israeli military planners must assume that King Hussein will be unable to remain outside an Arab military coalition led by Syria.

In the event of a war on Israel's eastern front, the deployment of Jordanian F-16s in such close proximity to Israel's most vital centers will make it extremely difficult to prevent Jordanian penetrations. Thus the supply of F-16s will make an Israeli preemptive strike against Jordan all but inevitable in a crisis.

Moreover, the high density of Syria's anti-aircraft missile network makes it essential that the Israeli Air Force defend against the Syrian attack by striking at these missiles via northern Jordan. If the U.S. sells Jordan mobile I-Hawk anti-aircraft missiles and F-16s, the IAF will be unable to operate freely against the Syrian offensive. It will either have to bear the high cost of forgoing the Jordanian route or forfeit an appreciable part of its bombing potential.

In these circumstances, U.S. arms sales to the Middle East should be based on three principles:

* Deterrence of Arab aggression by maintaining Israel's qualitative edge. This requires either the equipping of Israel with weapons a generation ahead of those offered to the Arabs or endowing Israel with the knowledge to produce the systems herself (thereby reducing Arab demands on Washington to receive the same weapons as Israel).

* Providing Jordan and Saudi Arabia only with weapons of a strictly defensive nature that will not boost their offensive capabilities.

* Avoiding the sale of sophisticated weapons to countries contiguous with Israel that remain in a state of war. Jordan's procurement of such weapons will be more palatable to Israel - as were Egypt's - once King Hussein enters direct peace negotiations.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Time and again in the annals of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Israel has faced the prospect of sophisticated American weapons being supplied to countries with which she is at war. This has been the object of an almost perennial dispute between Israel and U.S. administrations, though as a rule compromises have been reached or various "arrangements" have been made, including compensation for the supply of sophisticated American arms to the Arabs. However, Israel has been engaged in a fighting retreat over this issue, as her opposition has steadily eroded. Not only has Israel been hurt by this policy, the entire area has also suffered as a result of the escalated arms race.

In 1985, the issue of supplying advanced American weapons to Jordan and Saudi Arabia is once again on the agenda. Washington is interested in demonstrating support for its traditional friends in the Arab world, whom it considers to be moderate. It is especially interested in encouraging Jordan - which has recently shown her mettle by standing up to Syria - and compensating King Hussein's regime for its initiative in renewing diplomatic relations with Egypt and supporting the "moderate" wing of the PLO.

From Israel's standpoint, however, the supply of quality American weapons to the Arab states - and especially to Jordan - is more disturbing in 1985 than at any time in the past:

- * The Arabs' quantitative advantage in the balance of forces is growing as their armies continue to garner strength. The grave economic crisis currently plaguing Israel has made it necessary for the first time in the history of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), to close down operational units. Further cuts in Israel's defense budget will be necessary if there is to be a solution to the economic crisis.
- * Israel's qualitative advantage in the balance is eroding. This erosion is also caused by Israel's difficult economic situation which will weaken the IDF over the next two years. But it is primarily the result of the systematic acquisition by the Arab states of quality arms and "smart" weapons.
- * Syria's military strength has grown appreciably in terms of both quality and scope since the war in Lebanon. As a result, for the first time in Israel's history, the Syrian Army poses a military problem for the IDF even if Syria acts alone. Bolstering the offensive capability of other Arab states on Israel's eastern front may in the future create the temptation for Syria to spark off a military flare-up. Even though the countries in question are presently at loggerheads, it is highly doubtful

whether Jordan, for example, could avoid joining in a war that Syria might initiate against Israel.

In this context, supplying offensive American weaponry to Arab countries that have not made any practical move toward entering peace negotiations with Israel effectively undermines the peace process. At the very least, it flouts the formula - established in practice following the Camp David accords - whereby the supply of weaponry is related to the extent of a country's contribution to the achievement of a peace treaty, obtained through direct negotiations. And it helps to erode Israel's edge in the military balance which, in turn, encourages the Arab war option.

II. THE IMPACT OF ISRAEL'S ECONOMIC CRISIS

Israel's present economic crisis is the worst she has ever known. Though Jerusalem has managed to restrain the country's runaway inflation somewhat, it still stands at a minimum of a few hundred percent per annum. On top of that, Israel's external debt has burgeoned, and her foreign currency reserves are dwindling to the point where her ability to obtain credit from foreign banks will be impeded. Until now, Israel has managed to honor all her debts, but it is becoming increasingly difficult for her to do so. In the coming years she must repay the substantial loans she received after the Yom Kippur War of 1973. In Fiscal Year 1985, for example, Jerusalem must repay more than a billion

dollars in principal and interest. The cumulative interest on Israel's loans has reached a sum that is almost eight times the principal. 1986 is slated to be the toughest year of all regarding debt repayments. As a result, Israel's dependence on the United States grows from year to year -- a trend that could well cloud the relations between the two countries.

Israel has drawn up an economic recovery program with ambitious aims. These objectives are very difficult to achieve, however, not least because of the arms race and the constant need to increase military imports. Moreover, the Israeli leadership has decided that the economic recovery must be slow (too slow, in the view of the economists) for fear of major social upheavals that might rouse destructive and anti-democratic forces within Israeli society. This is one reason why Israel is finding it so difficult to effect drastic cuts in her national budget.

The cuts already implemented have left their mark on Israel's defense budget, and there is every reason to believe that the economic crisis, which has been exacerbated by the Lebanon war, will continue to eat into the IDF's might. Among the units that the IDF has been forced to eliminate are a number of Air Force combat squadrons. Other units have been transferred from the framework of the regular army to the reserves. The IDF's stocks of ammunition and equipment, including the most vital items, have dwindled. Most disquieting of all is the steep and constant decline in the number of flight hours accorded to the Israeli combat pilot and the number of tank-engine hours allowed for

training ground forces. In the course of time, these cutbacks must inevitably affect the level of the IDF's performance. The Israeli General Staff will also be forced to pare down the exercises and maneuvers for reserve units.

The economic crisis has similarly affected the programs to develop various weapons and ordnance systems. Some of these programs were to have ensured the IDF a qualitative advantage in certain aspects of warfare and perhaps enabled it to exploit tactical surprises.

An analysis of Israel's economic prospects and future security needs - based on the ratio of quantitative and qualitative forces - indicates that in the coming years Jerusalem will be very hard put to acquire all the weapons systems and equipment it will need. Despite generous American military assistance, which stands to grow by \$100 million in the 1986 fiscal year (in 1984 Israel received \$1.7 billion and in 1985 \$1.4 billion, all of it grants), Israel will not be able to consummate the force-building program she has presented to Pentagon experts. It is highly doubtful, for example, whether in another few years she will be in a position to purchase F-18 aircraft, even in quantities well below those requested by experts from her Air Force.

There are also serious doubts about the continued development and production of Israel's Lavi combat plane. Even if the United States continues to finance the plane's development, on the understanding that large sums of American aid will be expended on the project in Israel, once the

aircraft has been developed there is no chance that Israel will be capable of manufacturing it on her own. The only hope of salvaging the Lavi project -- on which opinions in Israel are divided -- lies in transferring the production of most of the plane's assembly to the United States.

III. COPING WITH THREE ARMS RACES

All of this means that Israel is going to have a very hard time keeping up with the arms race and maintaining the qualitative gap in her favor. In terms of quantities, the situation has always been severely lopsided. According to the September 1984 report of the SIPRI Institute in Stockholm, for example, over the period 1979-1983 the Arab states purchased 53.7% of all weapons sold to the Third World, compared to Israel's purchase of 4.7% of the same.

Israel, moreover, is the only country that must contend with three separate theaters of the arms race. The first is the race against weapons supplied to the Arab states by the Soviet Union. This has basically been a quantitative contest, although in the past few years it has taken on a qualitative character as well, since Moscow has begun to supply countries like Syria and Iraq with more accurate ground-to-ground missiles, more sophisticated ground-to-air missiles, and the like. Weapons are also supplied by other members of the Eastern Bloc, including Poland, Czechoslovakia and even Rumania, which has sold weaponry to Iraq and Egypt. In recent years, the People's Republic of China has likewise joined in the Middle East arms race as a supplier to the Arab states.

China has sold, inter alia, MiG-21 planes, tanks, artillery and mortars to Iraq and submarines, SAM-2 surface-to-air missiles, and MiG-19 and MiG-21 aircraft to Egypt.

The second theater of the arms race is the European arena, which has expanded substantially to embrace more and more countries each year. The Arab states are keenly interested in acquiring arms from Europe in order to upgrade their weapons systems, especially when they face difficulties in obtaining certain types of equipment from the Soviet Union or the United States. At the same time, the Arab countries are trying to exploit these arms deals to cultivate political relations with the European countries in question. Saudi Arabia, for example, has made an enormous effort to break West Germany's embargo on the sale of arms to countries in a state of war. Both Germany and Israel perceive the embargo as a highly sensitive moral as well as political injunction, which is precisely why Riyadh is so eager to shatter this ban.

No less than nine European countries are presently selling various types of arms, ammunition, and other military supplies to the Arab countries. Iraq is a pertinent example of the scope of these sales. From the signing of the Camp David accords in 1978 until the end of 1983, the European states sold Iraq \$10.6 billion worth of weapons systems and military equipment (the Soviet Union's arms sales to Baghdad during the same period amounted to \$7.7 billion).

Pride of place among the European arms exporters to the

Arab states goes to France, which offers various models of high-quality planes, helicopters, anti-helicopter missiles, anti-tank missiles, air-to-sea missiles (Exocet), artillery and mortars, "smart" weapons, armored personnel carriers, tank transporters, and radar. Britain has sold advanced tanks to Jordan and has added Syria to her list of clients by providing armored cars and special equipment for penetrating mine fields.

Italy has transacted a large arms deal with Libya by selling her Corvettes (she also sells artillery, helicopters, and radar to other Arab countries). Italy, however, is not the only European country that sells military equipment to Libya. She is joined by France and West Germany, which have sold thousands of tank transporters; Turkey, which has sold Libya tank landing craft; and Holland, which has sold Libya transport planes that serve her army (as has Canada). Three other European countries sell arms to the Arab states: Portugal and Austria have exported artillery to Iraq, and Spain has sold Iraq helicopters. To these we can add two extra-European countries that have made great efforts in recent years to sell various kinds of weaponry to the Arab states. The first is Brazil, which has already consummated deals for APCs and armored cars; the other is South Korea, which has marketed artillery.

The third arena of the Middle East arms race is the one created by the sale of American weapons. It is the most formidable in terms of both its scope and the level of the weaponry involved. The U.S. arena troubles Israel most of all

because of the fine quality of American arms, especially aircraft, air-to-air missiles, the various kinds of "smart" weapons, and advanced equipment for electronic warfare. The American armament reaching the Arab states is likewise the factor that will hamper Israel most in her efforts to preserve the qualitative gap.

By her massive arms sales to the Middle East, Washington has created a vicious circle. On the one hand, the United States wishes to strengthen Israel and help extricate her from her economic predicament. But on the other, she feels obliged to sell sophisticated arms and military equipment to a number of Arab states -- which immediately results in the escalation of Israel's requests for military assistance.

In order to maintain her qualitative advantage, Israel asks for state-of-the-art weapons systems, which are naturally the most expensive. But then the situation is aggravated further by Arab requests for the same equipment. Anything Israel has, the Arabs want, and they turn these requests into a "litmus-test" of American friendship. Egypt is already treated according to the same criteria as Israel in matters of military aid and the U.S. is coming under heavy pressure to treat Saudi Arabia and Jordan in the same way. (For example, Egypt has asked to receive everything that Israel purchased in order to vie with the Russian equipment that has flowed into Syria in the wake of the Lebanon war; Jordan wants F-16s rather than the only slightly less capable F-20s; and Saudi Arabia is seeking the most advanced version

of the F-15 - the F-15E Strike Eagle.) Further sales of sophisticated American equipment to the Arab states - especially advanced aircraft to Jordan - will doubtless exacerbate the vicious circle of the arms race and place an even greater strain on the Israeli economy.

IV. THE SYRIAN BUILD-UP

The war in Lebanon was another factor that considerably spurred the arms race in the region, and for that Israel can hold only herself to blame. From the moment that former Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon extended the proposed ground action against the PLO forces to include the Syrian garrison in Lebanon, Damascus had no choice but to ask the Soviet Union to replace the equipment it lost in the fighting and even add more sophisticated weaponry to its arsenal. The Soviet Union complied because of the devastating blow that Russian equipment had sustained during the war both in the air and in the sphere of anti-aircraft defense.

The Syrian Army's reorganization program - which was inaugurated before the war in Lebanon - has been revised and greatly expanded as a result of that clash. By the close of 1984 the Syrians had completed an important stage in this reorganization, though it will take a while before they fully assimilate all the weapons systems they have received from the Soviets. The Syrians also face grave problems regarding the professional level of their military personnel and a shortage of people trained in technical fields.

Even so, the Syrian Army is today regarded as a force

endowed with substantial fire power and maneuverability. It boasts the largest Air Force and greatest number of tanks of any Arab army. And even though the prevailing assessment is that the IDF will be capable of defeating it in an all-out war (with both sides sustaining heavy casualties), the Syrian Army is approaching the point at which it may well be prepared to initiate hostilities in the belief that it will be capable of winning localized battles, especially if it takes the IDF by surprise. Without doubt, this readiness will grow if Syria is confident that other Arab armies will join in the war once it is in progress.

One significant change in the Syrian Army since the war in Lebanon has been its growth, both in overall size and number of combat divisions. One of Syria's conclusions from the war was the need to expand her army so that it would be able to fight Israel on two fronts: Lebanon and the Golan Heights. Today the Syrian Army is approaching half a million men. As a result of postponing the demobilization of some of its six divisions prior to the Lebanon war, it now comprises eight divisions - five armored and three mechanized. Each of these divisions possess greater fire power because it has been augmented by additional tanks. After the Lebanon war, two corps commands were also established: one in Lebanon and the other on the Golan Heights. Another focus of its growing strength is the Syrian Army's special forces, which presently comprise thirty-six commando and paratroop battalions with many assault helicopters at their disposal -- and plans to

purchase more.

Parallel to this numerical growth has been an impressive upgrading of the kinds and quality of the weapons employed by the Syrian Army. From this standpoint the IDF is up against a force very different from the army it confronted in Lebanon in 1982. Syria's fleet of tanks has grown to some 4,000, 900 of them highly advanced T-72 Soviet tanks. The number of APCs (primarily the amphibious BMP-1) has multiplied many times over, and there has been a huge increase in anti-tank rocket launchers and mobile artillery. In short, the Syrian Army, with its forty brigades, has become an armored and mechanized force par excellence, and the increased size of this force will enable it to develop a number of operational efforts simultaneously.

Two developments in the Syrian Air Force are particularly notable: the rise in the number of combat planes to around 700, many of them advanced MiG-23 and Sukhoi-22 aircraft; and the increase in the number of helicopters to about 270, including some 80 assault helicopters equipped with anti-tank missiles.

Syria has likewise developed her ability to strike deep inside Israeli territory. She now deploys three different types of ground-to-ground missiles, including one of the advanced SS-21 missiles known for their accuracy (which is evidently intended for use against such targets as airfields). The Syrians have lengthened their "strategic arm" by means of these SS-21 missiles and SA-5 long range anti-aircraft missiles, whose batteries are manned by Russian

crews assisted by Syrian military personnel. Such weaponry, the Syrians believe, has considerably enhanced their ability to challenge Israel's air superiority.

Another Syrian undertaking worthy of attention lies in the field of chemical warfare. It is known that Syria has invested efforts in the development and production of gas. This is cause for particular concern because of the proximity to the Syrian border of populated areas in Israel. Moreover, Syria has acquired a new anti-naval capability from the Soviet Union, comprising four launchers of improved Styx land-to-sea missiles and longer-range anti-ship missiles (120 miles) that can reach Haifa Bay, where Israel's main port facilities are located.

The Syrian regime intends to continue expanding its army, though its plans will undoubtedly meet with difficulties due to Syria's adverse economic situation. While the Soviet Union supplies the Syrians with a wealth of arms at discount prices this does not have much of an ameliorating effect upon the ailing Syrian economy, whose real GNP has been on the decline for the past two years. As a result of the grave economic situation and the insufficient level of its personnel, the growth of the Syrian Army stands to be slower in the years to come.

However, this in no way changes the categorical Syrian tenet that the solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict must come through military means. Indeed, with the help of the Soviet Union, Syria has already succeeded in closing the

qualitative gap with Israel. Her ambitious arms-acquisition program has created a situation in which Israel no longer enjoys exclusivity in a number of military spheres (e.g. electronic warfare) and it will be more difficult for Israel to achieve a victory on the battlefield in terms of losses and wear and tear on equipment. Most pertinent of all, perhaps, as soon as the Arab party espousing a military solution is convinced that it has achieved strategic parity with Israel, it will be far more tempted to take military action.

V. JORDAN'S OFFENSIVE CAPABILITIES

The regional arms race has also come to clear expression in the changes that have taken place in the Jordanian Army. But before examining the elements characteristic of the Jordanian build-up, it is worthwhile looking into how the Israeli side views this development. Israeli strategists and experts quite rightly do not regard the build-up of the Jordanian and Syrian forces as two independent concerns. Much to the contrary, from Israel's point of view the growth and enhancement of the Jordanian and Syrian armies are intimately connected.

Admittedly, in light of the present ratio of forces, it appears highly unlikely that Jordan would initiate hostilities against Israel on her own. She lacks the military capability for such an undertaking, and her military resources would soon run out. Although the Jordanian Army is today capable of mounting localized operations to capture

portions of the West Bank, it is obvious that Jordan's ability to sustain an independent military endeavor is severely lacking.

The danger lies elsewhere. It stems from the prospect that Jordan would - willingly or under pressure - join a broad Arab military coalition. The Israeli working premise is that Jordan will not be able to remain outside such a coalition in the event of a war. Though Amman itself would probably not instigate a military clash, Jordan would find it impossible to stay out of a war initiated by others. Hussein did not want a war in 1967, but he found himself involved in it despite Israel's appeals and warnings not to enter the fray. That war cost him the West Bank, and consequently he did his best to stay clear of the joint Egyptian-Syrian attack on Israel in 1973. In fact, Sadat and Assad did not invite him to join them. Nevertheless, during the second stage of war, Hussein dispatched an expeditionary force to the Golan Heights, and the commanders of this force violated an order in engaging the Israelis in combat. Amman's explanation after the war was that Jordan could not afford to remain on the sidelines in such a situation.

It is precisely because Hussein is regarded as a moderate that Jordan feels obliged to prove -- as she has in the Iran-Iraq war -- that she is an actively involved member of the Arab camp. In the event of a future clash between Israel and Syria, and especially in the case of a broad-based war, the pressure will undoubtedly mount in Jordan

(particularly in the armed forces) to participate in one way or another. This assessment is shared by intelligence experts outside Israel, as well. Hence the Israeli premise that Jordan must be taken into account as a prospective partner to any future hostilities -- much as she was in 1967 -- is certainly justified.

Even if Jordan refrains from undertaking any serious military initiatives, she may well have an indirect influence on the contest between Israel and Syria. For considering the high density of Syria's anti-aircraft missile network and the hundreds of combat planes at her disposal, it is almost inevitable that the Israeli Air Force will move against Syria via northern Jordan. This is one of the natural routes for any force that wishes to pound away at the Soviet-built Syrian missile network. But a technologically advanced and active Jordanian anti-aircraft network could well obstruct this effort. If the Israeli Air Force decides to move against Syria via the Jordanian corridors, it would be at the cost of precious time and additional wear on its aircraft before it even engages the Syrians.

This would particularly be the case if Jordan acquires mobile I-Hawk anti-aircraft missiles from the United States. These, together with Jordan's 20 mobile Soviet SA-8 anti-aircraft missile launchers and 16 ZSU 23-24 anti-aircraft guns, could be concentrated in sensitive positions. The Israeli Air Force would then have to turn its attention to suppression of these weapons before it could operate freely against the Syrian threat. This situation

would be further complicated if the weapons involved are not only advanced anti-aircraft systems but also sophisticated F-16 interceptors. In that case a good portion of the Israeli aerial-attack force would be neutralized. Skyhawks, Kfirs, and even Phantoms would find themselves at a distinct disadvantage when confronted with Jordanian F-16s, and Israel would stand to lose many aircraft and pilots. In operational terms this would mean that, in the event of a clash with Syria, Israel must either forgo the Jordanian route or use it, but forfeit an appreciable part of her Air Force's bombing potential. The only other alternative is to take the chance of losing planes that cannot match the F-16.

This is why the enhancement of Jordan's military strength is not viewed in isolation from the overall Arab build-up -- and particularly the developments taking place in Syria. It has been argued that Jordan's military strength is at any rate directed solely against Syria, but that contention is unfounded. Syria and Jordan are presently rivals, and the tension between them may grow if Jordan takes concrete steps toward entering into direct negotiations with Israel. However, if Syria attempts to use her army against Hussein, it should not be assumed that Jordan will stand alone. Certainly other Arab states, such as Iraq and Egypt, will come to her aid, with Washington's encouragement. In 1970, well before the question of Jordan joining the Camp David process was on the agenda, even Israel was prepared to comply with Washington's request by massing her forces on

Syria's flank when Damascus sent troops into northern Jordan.

More to the point, perhaps, is the fact that although Jordan may regard Syria as a threat, she is not building her army as a classic offensive force in order to cross the border into Syrian territory. Thus the question Israel's military planners must ask is what Jordan's offensive build-up is intended for? If only on the basis of past experience, Israel must seriously entertain the possibility that Jordan -- which remains in a state of war with her -- will exploit an opportunity to attack her in league with other Arab armies. It would be a grave error if Israeli planners failed to take this "worst case" into account.

In 1984, the first phase of the reorganization of the Jordanian Army (ground forces) was completed. Over the years, thanks to their armament and training, the Jordanian ground forces have been shaped into a solid offensive army. From the standpoint of its size, the Jordanian Army has not undergone any substantive change. It comprises two armored divisions and two mechanized divisions broken down into six armored, four mechanized, and four infantry brigades, and one paratroop brigade. The changes resulting from the reorganization are expressed by the new weapons systems that accord the army its offensive capability. The Jordanian ground forces possess impressive fire power, high mobility, and an appreciably extended range of operation (now that it is no longer necessary to refuel tanks with great frequency). Two changes are especially prominent. A substantial portion of the 1,000 tanks in the Jordanian Army are considered far

superior to their predecessors. The British have sold Jordan 250 advanced Chieftan tanks with an excellent 120 mm. cannon and good firing control, while the Americans have added the latest-model M-60 tanks and revamped Jordan's fleet of outmoded Centurion tanks. At the same time, the Jordanians have doubled their number of tank transporters. The other major change in the ground forces relates to artillery. Today all the Jordanian artillery attached to field units is mobile, in addition to which dozens of TOW missile launchers have been purchased for mounting on vehicles.

The second phase in the reorganization of the Jordanian Army concentrates primarily on the Air Force. The Jordanians have purchased helicopters outfitted with anti-tank missiles; mobile SA-8 missile batteries have been acquired from the Soviet Union as have radar-directed 23 mm artillery; and today Jordan boasts twenty surface-to-air missile batteries (compared with five at the end of 1978). Her F-104 planes have been replaced by Mirage F-1s, but Jordan has not rested content with this advancement and is trying to purchase even more sophisticated aircraft, namely, two squadrons of F-16s.

The improvements in the Jordanian Army have resulted not only from the acquisition of more advanced weaponry but also from intensive and thorough training. Jordan's Army is one of the only military forces in the Middle East that has managed to keep up its training and maneuvers over the past few years without interruption, whereas the training programs of the other armies -- including the Israeli, Syrian, and Iraqi

forces -- have for the most part been disrupted either by wars or economic difficulties. The Jordanians are assisted in this training effort by the United States, although the Jordanian system is highly independent and the American "extra" does not represent a very substantial proportion of it. Nevertheless, there are grounds to believe that this American "extra" may be enhancing precisely the offensive constituents within the Jordanian Army, and this is particularly troubling to Israel.

VI. ISRAEL'S OPPOSITION

These considerations and anxieties are what have led Israel to oppose the supply of sophisticated weapons to Jordan and other Arab states as a matter of principle. Jerusalem has been consistent in this position, though from time to time it has been prepared to mitigate its opposition on the basis of certain compromises. In 1965, for example, the American administration asked Israel not to mobilize her friends in the United States against the sale of American tanks to Jordan, in return for which Jerusalem received assurances that these tanks would be stationed exclusively on the East Bank of the Jordan and would not cross the river. At first the Jordanians stationed only the tanks they had purchased in Britain on the West Bank. But that remained true only until 1967, when Jordan reneged on her commitment and transferred units equipped with American tanks over the river. In other words, Jordan honored her promise as long as there was quiet along the border; the moment tension began to

rise -- well before the actual outbreak of the Six Day War -- she was no longer able to keep her word because it flew in the face of operational logic.

Adamant opposition to the supply of advanced weaponry to Jordan is symbolized today not by a member of the Likud Party but by Israel's Defense Minister (and formerly both her Prime Minister and Chief of Staff), Yitzhak Rabin. On his first visit to Washington as Defense Minister, Rabin was asked to comment on the supply of American weaponry to Jordan. In fact, this question arose during most of his meetings in the American capital -- in his session with President Reagan and an earlier one with Defense Secretary Weinberger, as well as in meetings with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Congressional committees.

Rabin's answer was unequivocal: "Every Israeli leader in the past and the present -- and we can assume in the future as well -- cannot but oppose the supply of weapons to Arab states that insist on remaining in a state of war with Israel." When asked by the head of the Joint Chiefs, General Vesey, how it would then be possible to ensure the stability of King Hussein's regime, Rabin replied: "I have learned from my experience as a military man and a man well versed in political life in the Middle East that more arms do not necessarily ensure the survival of a regime. On the other hand, it is clear that more arms sales to an Arab state constitute a greater threat to Israel. This is an additional burden on Israel and, in the final analysis, on the American

budget." Rabin was not concerned by the possibility that the Arab states would turn to the Soviet Union for arms if they were rejected by the United States. "American weaponry endangers us more," he explained.

Not everyone agrees with Rabin's vigorous and uncompromising approach. Another, more pragmatic view, while not disregarding the peril entailed in the sale of sophisticated American weapons to the Arab countries, also perceives its potentially positive side. This view is championed, inter alia, by the director of the Prime Minister's Office, Avraham Tamir, who headed the IDF's Planning Division for many years and served a succession of defense ministers. Tamir contends that America's military involvement with the Arab states accords Washington greater influence and indirectly fosters the mitigation of the Arabs' extremist positions. If Washington plays its cards right, the argument goes, this otherwise dangerous instrument can effectively contribute toward advancing the peace process in the region. Hence this approach places emphasis not on the moral and prescriptive facets of the issue but on the pragmatic side. Since Washington will at any rate supply sophisticated weapons systems to the Arabs, Israel should reconcile herself to this inevitability but use the opportunity to establish certain conditions.

The sales of American arms to the Arab states is the only case in which Israel is in a position to influence the particulars of the transaction. Her voice is not heard at all when it comes to the massive supply of weapons by the Soviet

Union or other Eastern Bloc countries, and her influence is very limited in the European states and other countries that supply arms to the Arab world (with the exception of West Germany due to the special and sensitive relationship between the two countries). In the United States, however, Israel is able to exercise some influence to help determine the kind, quality, and amount of weaponry supplied to the Arab states, and she can suggest that the administration stipulate special conditions for the sale of these arms. Moreover, the supply of American weapons to the Arab states creates an obligation for Washington to compensate Israel with even more sophisticated weaponry and greater financial aid to meet her security needs.

VII. PRINCIPLES FOR ARMS SALES POLICY

What demands should Israel raise in Washington regarding the supply of arms to the Arab states?

In terms of Israel's security concerns, priority must be given to the principle of preserving the qualitative gap in Israel's favor. Due to her small size, limited manpower (relative to her Arab adversaries), and need to base the lion's share of her military force on reserve units, the only way for Israel to preserve a balance of forces that will deter the Arabs is by maintaining this qualitative edge. American presidents, including President Reagan, have committed the United States to preserving this gap.

In practice, this means not only providing more military

aid but first and foremost ensuring that in a number of spheres Israel is equipped with weapons one "generation" ahead of those offered to the Arab countries. This is especially important in terms of aerial weaponry but also applies to arms for the ground forces, electronic equipment, and ammunition. For the most part, the preservation of the quality gap can be accomplished by supplying Israel with more advanced weaponry. Yet it can likewise be solved less conspicuously by providing Israel with knowledge to produce state-of-the-art technology herself. Israeli planners must seriously consider whether it is not advisable for Israel to refrain from continually requesting more advanced systems, since these requests immediately create pressures from countries such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia to be rewarded in kind, and in the end Washington yields to their demands. The solution may lie in endowing Israel with the knowledge necessary to produce the systems in question herself, thereby perhaps decelerating the arms race. For here Israel has an incontestable advantage over her neighbors due to her advanced industrial-technological infrastructure.

The second principle to be considered is the reduction of offensive elements of the arms and equipment supplied to the Arab states. If the point of providing these weapons is indeed to bolster the defensive capability of countries such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia, emphasis should be placed on selling them systems of a defensive nature and refraining as much as possible from supplying arms and equipment that will boost their offensive capability. An aircraft with a large

carrying capacity is an example of offensive equipment. Similarly, a large number of Cobra assault helicopters, assault and bridging equipment, even exaggerated amounts of mobile artillery and Katyusha-type rockets, to say nothing of such death-dealing arms as cluster bombs and "smart" weapons, should all be regarded as offensive weapons. The bomb racks for F-15s that Washington promised to withhold from the Saudis are perhaps the prime example of how ostensibly marginal equipment can upgrade a weapon's offensive impact.

The third principle to be stressed is the need to be scrupulous in not providing sophisticated weapons to countries that are contiguous with Israel and still in a state of war with her. Jerusalem is far more sensitive about the supply of American arms to Jordan, for example, than to Oman or some of the other countries on the Persian Gulf and in North Africa because the army of one of the Arab confrontation states poses a far greater threat than a more remote armed force -- even though distant Arab states are perfectly able to send expeditionary forces into battle against Israel.

By this same principle, the sale of many F-15s to Saudi Arabia, although a serious problem, is less troubling to the Israeli Air Force than the supply of a few F-16s to Jordan. This is of course provided that Washington does not sell Saudi Arabia the more advanced F-15E ground attack aircraft and insists that the arms purchased by Saudi Arabia are to be used for defense alone, are not to be deployed near the

Israeli border, and will not be transferred to any other country either directly or in the form of expeditionary forces sent to fight a third party.

However, the sale of any distinctly offensive weaponry to Jordan is viewed with a very jaundiced eye in Israel, though there are, of course, varying degrees of opposition. The milder objections apply to the Stinger hand-held anti-aircraft missile and thereafter to the mobile I-Hawk anti-aircraft missiles. Both weapons have offensive capabilities and the potential to neutralize a sizable portion of the Israeli aerial-attack force in the event of a war with Syria. Stronger objections apply to the supply of sophisticated aircraft. Israel's protests are all the more strident here because of Jordan's proximity (more than any other Arab state) to her most vital centers. It takes but a few minutes to reach these targets from Jordanian airfields. Hence many Israeli experts regard the matter of the F-16 as all but a categorical taboo. The prevailing feeling is that even an air force on the level of the IDF's cannot avert penetrations toward sensitive targets at such short range.

All parties should therefore be forewarned that the supply of F-16s to Jordan will make an Israeli preemptive strike against Jordan at the outset of a serious clash or a war on her eastern front all but inevitable. Talk of the need to deal Jordan a "knock-out blow" during the early stages of a war has been heard before, for concern over Jordan's access to sensitive targets in Israel was substantial even when the Jordanian Air Force was equipped with planes of a lesser

offensive capability (such as the F-5 or the Mirage F-1). It will doubtless be overwhelming if the Jordanian Air Force is equipped with F-16s.

It would be a grave mistake for Jerusalem completely to disregard Jordan's military needs. Israel is not entitled to demand that Jordan be completely exposed from a military standpoint. But the resolution of these competing trends must be sought in the Camp David formula. Even though Israel is hardly delighted about the sale of advanced weaponry to Egypt, in principle she has no grounds for complaint, since these arms are not being supplied to a country that maintains a state of war with Israel or declares its intention to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict by military means. Similarly, Jordan's procurement of sophisticated armaments will be more acceptable to Israel when and if Hussein takes the concrete step of entering into direct negotiations with Israel. This is also the most reasonable and practical formula, as peace between Israel and Jordan will clearly reduce the military threat to them both.



