

Israel's changing geostrategic posture

Abstract

This paper analyzes Israel's changing understanding of its geostrategic posture from its establishment in 1948 to the current era. It starts by reviewing traditional Israeli geostrategic ideas and their implementation, mostly, as reflected in the nation's national security doctrine. The paper then investigates the effect of Israel's territorial expansion after 1967 on Israeli ideas about geostrategy. Finally, the paper shows how changing global, regional, and technological variables in the last two decades have transformed how Israeli elites understand their geostrategic realities and how they allocate resources in response to these changing conditions.

Keywords

Israel • Middle East • geostrategy • Mediterranean • natural gas • Jews

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Received: 25 October 2021
Accepted: 10 May 2022

Introduction

On March 27, 2022, Israel's Foreign Minister hosted his Egyptian, Moroccan, Bahraini, Emirati, and American colleagues in Sde Boker, the resting place of Israel's founding father, David Ben Gurion. The meeting – titled the Negev Summit – concluded with a decision by the forum to meet on a regular basis, and to create six permanent working groups that will deal with a variety of regional issues including security, energy, tourism, health, education, and food and water security (Ravid 2022).

All in attendance highlighted the significance of the moment. Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita called the event a "very historic and timely ... summit" while his Emirati peer, Abdullah Bin Zayed, declared that this was "a historic moment." Israeli Foreign Minister Lapid explained the historical significance, stating that: "What we are doing here is making history, building a new regional architecture based on progress, technology, religious tolerance, security, and intelligence cooperation (United States Department of State 2022).

The statement went to the heart of Israel's old geostrategic predicament: while situated at the heart of the Middle East, the state was rejected by all regional players for decades, as they saw it as an illegitimate colonial implant. Seen from Jerusalem, therefore, the long and slow process of acceptance into the region has reached a new peak. Israel – once a regional pariah shunned by its neighbors – is becoming an active and accepted peer state, and is even participating in shaping the regional strategic architecture.

The following paper investigates this process: the evolution of Israel's understanding of its geostrategic realities and its subsequent policies. Geostrategy, in this paper, refers to the way in which a state's geographic configuration affects its national power-based priorities, mostly as manifested in its security doctrine, foreign relations, and to a more limited extent, economic priorities, mostly in terms of natural resources and energy production. Among the core aspects of the geographic consideration under study are the state's location, size, shape, elevation, and hydrographic characteristics, including access to

the sea. Another important aspect is the location of the state's foes (Rosen 1977; Tovy 2007; Starr 2013; Makinen 2017; Csurgai 2022). As the paper will show, changes in some of these, such as the Israel's territorial expansion in 1967, and the discovery of natural gas in its Exclusive Economic Zone in the Mediterranean, as well as the rise of far away Iran as a threat, has had a dramatic effect on Israel's understanding of its geostrategic situation. The paper analyzes Israel's geostrategic understanding in two dimensions: Israel's immediate geographic configuration, mostly the size and shape of its territory; and its connection to the region in which it is situated.

Israel's traditional geostrategic posture: Early Years

Israel's traditional geostrategic posture was born out of its 1947–1949 war of independence in at least three significant ways. First, on May 15, 1948, one day after Israel declared its independence, all four of its neighbors – Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon – invaded the young state¹ (Morris 2001). The invaders also included forces from three other Arab states that had no border with Israel: Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan. Two other non-state Arab armed forces also participated in the invasion: the Arab Liberation Army, created by the Arab League. These forces invaded Israel from the north and the east. Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood forces invaded from the south. Earlier, between November 1947 and May 1948, and while still under British rule, the Jews and Arabs of the British mandatory territory of Eretz-Yisrael-Palestine were engaged in bitter fighting following the Arab rejection of the UN-sanctioned partition of the land (Shlaim 2000). The war led to a significant loss of life for the new state – 1% of the pre-war Jewish population was killed. Among the dead, almost 50% were civilians (Lorch 1961). Although Israel emerged victorious, the trauma left an everlasting sense of isolation and vulnerability. Horowitz (1982, p. 4) observed that "the fundamental

¹More recent Israeli scholarship casts doubt as to whether Lebanon indeed invaded Israel, or only supported the invading forces of the Arab League's Arab Liberation Army with artillery and logistics (Maayan & Erlich 2000).

starting point of all shades of Israeli concept of national security is the assumption that Israel is a nation in existential distress.” In the Israeli understanding of the challenge, it is multidimensional, deep, and comprehensive, perhaps even “insolvable” (Yaniv 1994, p. 15). Israel’s fears had two dimensions. Enmity with the Arab world at large, including a deep concern that all neighboring nations, as well as the larger Arab world, might launch an all-out war against the young state again and “annihilate it” (Levite 1988, p. 7). Israel further understood the conflict as taking place between it and the Palestinians, and over the control of the land. Both levels of conflict were connected. For example, much of the Arab opposition to Israel’s legitimacy was based on Israel’s conflict with the Palestinians. Some Israeli scholars have looked critically at the existential fear. Yaniv (1994), for example, pointed out that the threat perception might be exaggerated, and in any event, it needs to be communicated to the Israeli public in a balanced way. If Israeli elites constantly stress the existential threat, then the public might feel that Israel offers them no future.

Second, the war left the newly born Jewish state with a peculiar set of borders: the small state (some 20,000 sq km)² was about 500 km long north to south but narrow on its east-west axis. In its narrowest area, it was only 13 km wide. Added to the challenge, this narrow section was near Israel’s most densely populated central sector. The whole sector was overshadowed by the hills of Samaria and Judea that were occupied by Jordan. Israel’s capital, Jerusalem, was on the border with Israel’s eastern neighbor, Jordan. The city was divided until 1967 between the two countries, placing all major government functions, including the Parliament, Prime Minister’s office, and the Supreme Court within the range of light artillery from Jordan.³ Portions of the state’s northern section, including its only major internal lake, Kinneret, was dominated by the Syrian Golan Heights.

Finally, the war highlighted for Israelis that they stood alone, and could not rely on support from international allies (Levite 1988). The state was created by a UN resolution, but the vicious war that followed taught Israel that international norms and international bodies will not suffice in guaranteeing the state’s security. During the war, the US and UK forbade any arms support to the warring parties. However, with existing British-Egyptian and British-Jordanian defense ties at the time (including a British commander of the Jordanian military), the embargo was mostly a constraint on the Israeli side. Indeed, at least in two cases, British forces (acting, in effect, on Egypt’s behalf) clashed with Israeli forces in air battles (Cohen 2004). The Soviets did supply some arms to Israel during the war (via Czechoslovakia), but the USSR’s ideological opposition to Zionism meant that Israel could not rely on this alliance. Indeed, the episode of Soviet support was never repeated.

The years that followed the war solidified Israeli ideas about the nation’s geostrategic reality. Most of all, a sense of political and geographical isolation prevailed. All Arab nations maintained

their hostility towards Israel, seeing it as an illegitimate settler-colonial state interjected by Western powers into the Arab heartland. As a practical matter, all Arab states kept the borders with Israel closed, or closed for Israelis. Occasional armed incursions from Jordan and Egypt (as well as Israeli reprisals) ensued in the 1950s and 1960s. Arab nations also instituted an economic boycott, under which international corporations that conducted business with Israel would be banned from Arab markets (Turck 1977). Carriers flying to and from Israel could not use Arab air spaces. At various times, Egypt – against its international commitments – blocked access via the Suez Canal to Israeli ships and to non-Israeli ones traveling to and from Israel. Twice, in 1956 and 1967, Egypt blocked the Tiran Straits that led to Israel’s only port on the Red Sea, Eilat. In both cases, Egyptian acts contributed to the onset of the Israeli-Egyptian wars. Seen from Israel, all these immediate realities were clouded in a most challenging geostrategic reality. In 1970, Israel was a tiny Jewish state of some 20,000 sq km with three million citizens, surrounded by dozens of hostile Arab nations with a total landmass of some 13 million sq km, and a population of 130 million (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1998; World Bank 2021). Yaniv (1994, p. 16) reports that the nation’s founding father and first Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion, shared his fears with his close aid. Pointing to a map of the region, the Prime Minister would say: “Look, we are a tiny dot; how will it survive in this Arab world?”.

Moreover, the two decades following the 1947–9 war also showed Israel that it could not alter its borders. Hope that territorial gains in the Sinai Peninsula in the 1956 war could be translated into a permanent territorial change were scrapped under an aggressive Soviet-American decree, and Israel withdrew to its original borders. Israel’s geostrategic imagination, therefore, included a reliance, of sorts, on the imaginary geostrategic depth of the world’s Jews. Some Jews volunteered to fight alongside Israel in 1947–9, and 1956, and American Jews were able to offer some financial support to the young Jewish state. But this was more imaginary than real, as the largest Jewish communities did not place Israel at the center of their attention. The Jewish community of 2–3 million in the USSR (Rothenberg 1967) was under the Soviet yoke and could not even express open support for the Jewish state, let alone offer more specific support. Some sectors of the American Jewish community assisted Israel, but overall, the large community of some 5–6 million Jews (American Jewish Yearbook 1962) focused on its immediate personal and communal needs rather than the far away Israeli state.

These realities led to the evolution of a strategic outlook that is largely still in place more than seventy years into Israel’s existence. First, the nation is under the immediate threat of annihilation, as it lies in a region that largely rejects its legitimacy. Moreover, it is a region with high levels of violence as seen more recently in the civil wars in Yemen, Lebanon, Syria, and others. In part, the Israeli psyche on the issue was, and still is, affected by the mass killing of Jews in Europe during the Second World War, in which a third of the Jewish people at the time – some six million Jews – were murdered. Therefore, the Israeli state believes it needs to develop an effective power-based response to this challenge. This includes strong armed forces, an effort to secure an alliance with a great power, and the development (without admitting to it) of a nuclear deterrent. The purpose of this power – the Iron Wall – would be to deflect any Arab attack in the short term, and in the long term, to alter Arab preferences to the point of abandoning the desire to obliterate the Jewish state. Ze’ev Jabotinsky (1923), a right-wing early Zionist thinker, devised this idea, which was taken up in effect by David Ben Gurion, the socialist leader who founded the Jewish state.

Second, as there is an inherent imbalance in resources in favor of the Arab world, Israel strives to compensate for this

²Small as it was, the state was larger than the area allotted to the Jews under the partition resolution, as Israel had occupied a portion of the area allocated for Arab Palestinians. The remaining areas that were allotted to the Arab Palestinians under the 1947 UN partition plans were occupied by Jordan and Egypt.

³Adding to the challenge was the fact that most states did not recognize Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, although levels of recognition changed over time. By 1967, some 40% of foreign embassies in Israel were located in Jerusalem, but in 1980, when Israel enshrined Jerusalem’s status as a capital in a constitutional-like basic law, all but two embassies (El Salvador & Costa Rica) left the city for Tel Aviv, following a specific UNSCR calling for such a move. By 2006, they too withdrew their recognition of the city as Israel’s capital. In 2018, the US recognized the city as Israel’s capital and moved its embassy there. The American decision was followed by three other states: Guatemala, Honduras, and Kosovo (Al Jazeera 2021, Ben-Zion 2021). The specific position of many other states is not clear, as they seem to accept de facto, Israeli sovereignty in Western Jerusalem, the portion of the city held by Israel since its establishment; this, as opposed to the non-recognition of Israel’s sovereignty over the east city, occupied by Israel in 1967. For example, most heads of state that visit Israel meet the Israeli Prime Minister in Jerusalem (Goren 2018).

by using technology, and the effective utilization of its human resources. Hence, there has been massive investment in education, national R & D, and aspects of the armed response, in which technology compensates for material imbalances.

Third, Israel strived to amend the cease-fire borders of 1949, which left it in an uncomfortable geostrategic situation. This idea waxed and waned over the years but was implemented once Israel expanded its territory following the 1967 Six-Day War (Van Creveld 2004). Geostrategy also shaped Israeli military doctrine. The significant manpower gap against the Arab world meant that Israel needed to fully utilize its population for a possible conflict. The state instituted conscription (for both men and women), and all retired conscripts remained part of a reserve (until the 40s in some cases) that can be called at any time. The nation's narrow territory meant that Israel could not absorb a serious armed ground attack as it had no strategic depth. It, therefore, placed a high premium on deterrence, early warning, and swift victory, which included a maneuver into its foes' territory (Freilich 2018). The latter meant that it preferred to take first-mover advantage and attack first, as indeed happened in 1956, 1967, and the 1982 wars. At the same time, wanting to secure great power support, all three preemptive wars were launched only after Israel secured the early understanding of its great power ally at the time. The fear that a war would occur on a number of fronts (as indeed later occurred in 1967 and 1973), led the Israel Defense Force to adopt an agile approach, in which forces could be moved swiftly from one front to another (Herzog 2005).

Finally, Israel adopted what Yossef calls a "doctrinal hybridity," a defensive posture strategically, but a combination of defensive and offensive measures on the operational level. This approach reflected Israel's understanding of its geostrategic situation: in light of the massive Arab superiority in territory and manpower, Israel cannot resolve the hostility against it by force. This will only come when Arab states change their approach. At the same time, Israel's narrow dimensions meant, as noted, that the state cannot absorb a massive attack, and should therefore go on the offensive as soon as possible – preferably even before the other side strikes (Yossef 2021).

Territorial expansion and changing geostrategic notions after the 1967 war

The 1967 Six-Day War introduced a dramatic change in Israeli geostrategic realities, though not necessarily in its approach. Within a few days, Israeli forces occupied the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt, the West Bank in Jordan, and the Golan Heights in Syria. These moves alleviated, in effect, Israel's immediate geostrategic concerns, as it created buffers between its core metropolis and its main foes. Yet, the change was not deemed permanent and did not lead to a long-term change in Israel's own understanding of its geostrategic situation.

The new territories allowed Israel to try to use the land as leverage to secure its acceptance into the region, through land (or portions of it) for peace and recognition deals. Israel and its allies held that this was the accepted international interpretation of UNSCR 242 of November 1967, though others stressed that the resolution mostly implies that Israel should withdraw from the areas it occupied in 1967 (Bailey 1985). Either way, UNSCR 242 serves as the framework for the peace accord Israel signed later with Egypt (1979), the Palestine Liberation Organization (1993), and Jordan (1994), which indeed included a land for peace core.

The limits of territorial expansion as security were further made clear when Israel's main foe at the time, Egypt, aided by massive Soviet support, launched into a three-year war of attrition (1967–1970) in which Israeli forces on the southern edge of the new buffer in Sinai were constantly attacked (Adamsky 2006).

To highlight the temporary nature of Israeli control, Israel did not annex the newly occupied lands and kept them under military rule within the framework of the laws of occupation⁴ (Benvenisti 2012). The limits of holding on to the new buffers were further proven when Egypt and Syria launched a coordinated surprise attack on Israel in October 1973. Israel regained most of the land it lost in the first days of the war, but the lesson was clear: territorial expansion alone would not change Israel's geostrategic predicament. Then followed three decades in which Israel indeed pursued a political path to alleviate its geostrategic challenges: in 1979, it signed a peace accord with Egypt in which it traded the large Sinai desert it had occupied in 1967 for peace and recognition, as well as for security assurances in the form of a demilitarized Sinai and significant US guarantees and military support. Israel also negotiated a similar deal with Syria, as late as the first decade of the 21st century, but none materialized. Israel signed a peace accord with Jordan in 1994. Jordan no longer demanded the West Bank, which it lost to Israel in 1967, and joined the Arab consensus that the land should be handed over to the Palestinians. Israel indeed negotiated with the Palestinians from 1993 to the early 2010s. These talks led to the creation of a weak Palestinian political entity in portions of the West Bank, but Israel remains the dominant actor there. The West Bank is the only case in which hard realist calculations are intermixed with ideology. This hilly region is located just to the east of Israel's densely populated central sector and is within easy reach for monitoring and attacking this most sensitive (and narrow) region of Israel, including the possibility of driving a wedge through the Jewish state to reach the Mediterranean Sea.

Moreover, for decades the region was perceived to be an effective natural barrier to an invasion from the east. The geostrategic calculation, however, got complicated. Israel wanted to keep the region for security purposes but did not want to absorb its local Palestinian population, for fear that it would lead to a loss of Israel's Jewish majority. Israel's Prime Minister during the 1967 war, Levi Eshkol, explained that "we want the dowry [the land], but not the bride [the local population]" (Raz 2013). The Minister of Defense during the war, Moshe Dayan, stated (later in his career) that Israel "should not rule one million Palestinians, but should also avoid being an alien" in the West Bank (Dayan 1978).

In the first decade of Israeli control, the government's (unofficial) strategy was to keep portions of the West Bank for defensive purposes but hand most of it back to Jordan in return for a peace treaty (Alon 1976). When no serious negotiations took place, Israel began settling its citizens in those portions of the West Bank it wanted to keep for itself (Tenenbaum & Eiran 2005).

The 21st century: Into a new reality

The 21st century brought another change to Israeli ideas about its geostrategic posture. Unlike the changes that followed the 1967 war, these more recent ones have been gradual and can only be noticed now as we look back. The first change is that Israel no longer thinks of its immediate neighbors as a significant threat. Egypt and Jordan have peace accords with the Jewish state, and Syria is disintegrating amid a long civil war. Iraq – once a serious threat in Israeli eyes – was beaten by the US in 1991 and then in 2003, and no longer seems to be able to threaten Israel.

The second change is the rise of new threats: (1) a regional power that is over 1,000 km away – Iran, (2) two non-state actors at its borders – Hezbollah in Lebanon and Syria, Hezbollah and Hamas, mostly in Gaza do not pose an existential threat and are largely deterred by Israeli power. Iran, on the other hand, is seen

⁴The one exception was the city of Jerusalem, which Israel annexed. However, this move reflected an ideational preference and not a geostrategic calculation.

as possibly acquiring the ability to obliterate Israel if its militarized nuclear program evolves with the development of a nuclear weapon. In a 2012 poll, most Israelis said that if Iran develops a bomb, it will use it against the Jewish state (Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs 2012). Israeli strategists warn against the regional effects of an Iranian bomb and argue that other actors in the area may strive to develop their own weapons, thus destabilizing the Middle East and making it less safe for Israel. A third concern is that Iran's close ally (and some would argue proxy) in the region, Hezbollah, would be willing to take greater risks in challenging Israel, as it would feel more secure with the existence of an Iranian bomb (Eiran & Malin 2013).

Iran also operates close to Israel's borders by supporting Hezbollah in Lebanon and Syria, including deploying armed elements close to the Israeli border. In response, Israel launched into a "campaign between the wars," named Mabam (the Hebrew acronym for the term), which includes multiple non-declared attacks, mostly in Syria, to curb Iran's regional footprint (Adamsky 2017; Dassa, Kaye & Efron 2020).

The threat Hezbollah is posing to Israel is seen as closely tied to the Iranian threat. The major concern is that, in the next round of violence between the two, Hezbollah will be able to shell the Israeli home front and possibly occupy a small portion of the area near the Israeli-Lebanese border (Mizrahi, Dekel & Bazak 2020).

The rise of the Iranian challenge forces Israeli geostrategists to expand their ambit. Rather than focusing on the immediate environment, they now look to the Persian Gulf in search of allies who similarly fear Iran. Hence the 2020 Abraham accords, in which Bahrain and the UAE recognized Israel and launched into diplomatic relations with it.

The third change is Israel's turning to the sea. Israel lies along the shores of the Mediterranean. Most of its population and business centers are in the seaside metropolises of Tel-Aviv and Haifa. Yet, the sea has been an afterthought in Israeli strategic thinking. It did not pose a threat or any special opportunity for decades.

Yet, starting in the early 2000s, the Jewish state began paying more attention to the sea for two reasons (Teff-Seker et al. 2019). First, starting in 1999, Israel discovered a few large natural gas depots in its EEZ in the Mediterranean. The first discovery was followed by even larger ones as the decade moved forward. The gas was brought online in 2004, and by 2016, over half of Israel's energy consumption drew on these gas reserves (Israeli Ministry of Energy 2021). Israel is also now dependent on the sea, as it has become the major source of its water supply. The Jewish state suffered traditionally from lack of water. However, beginning in 2003, it constructed five desalination plants on the shores of the Mediterranean. By 2016, these contribute some 25% of all water supply (including for agricultural and industrial needs), and most of the drinking water (Avgar 2018). Another reason for the new interest in the sea is the rise of the navy. Traditionally, the service played a minor role in Israeli strategy. However, Israeli concerns about an Iran armed with a nuclear weapon led Israel to develop a significant submarine arm, which according to many reports, is equipped with a nuclear second-strike capability. Israel, however, has never admitted to owning nuclear weapons (Eiran 2020). The turn westward, to the sea, also includes a shift in Israeli foreign policy – specifically, the creation of a regional quasi alliance with Cyprus and Greece (Tziarras 2016). This arrangement includes regular meetings of the heads of state, ministers, and parliamentarians from the three nations (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2020). It further includes close military cooperation, including joint exercises (Jerusalem Post 2021). The alliance is driven, in part, by joint energy interests. A Greek company (which is backed, among others, by Israeli investors) is a part-owner of some of the Israeli fields (Fisher 2021). Moreover, the two nations, as well as

Cyprus and Italy, are planning to lay a massive pipeline that will carry gas from the Eastern Mediterranean through Greece to Italy (Israeli Ministry of Energy 2020). However, this new geostrategic horizon requires a delicate balancing act. Turkey, an important regional actor, had long viewed Greece and Cyprus as adversaries. Israel and Turkey were allies in the 1990s, but the relationship soured in the early 2000s, a state of affairs that played an important role in the evolution of the Israeli-Hellenic alliance. However, Turkey is trying to mend its relations with Israel.

In sum, Israel's geostrategic ambit has also moved westward and now includes the maritime space of the Eastern Mediterranean. It also includes, for the first time in its history, an element of protecting Israeli natural resources.

The final change in Israeli geostrategic imagination is Israel's move from isolation to connectivity. As discussed above, Israel's sense of siege was forged in its early days, and this remained for decades. Even after Israel signed peace accords with Egypt and Jordan, Israeli elites did not feel connected to the region. Not only is the religion and origin of most Israelis different from the rest of the region, but there has also been limited movement of people, goods, and ideas between Israel and its neighbors. Most of its imports and exports are with far away markets in America, Europe, and Asia. It is not surprising then that Israeli elites view Israel as an "island" (Lapid 2021). However, as I have shown above, the Israeli geostrategic ambit is widening. To the east, Israel is engaging with the Gulf, and to the west, it is engaging with Greece and Cyprus. This allows Israel to fully take advantage of its spatial location as an area located between Asia, Europe, and Africa. Specifically, in recent years, Israel has become a transfer state for regional trade. As the Syrian civil war blocked trade routes between Iraq and Jordan to Turkey, an alternative route opened via Israel (Shmil 2013). Similarly, Israel agreed in October 2020 that Gulf oil would be transferred from its short shore on the Red Sea to its ports on the Mediterranean shore (Gutman 2020). As part of this new thinking of connectivity, Israeli officials are advancing several grander designs that would further connect Israel to the region. One plan calls for connecting Israel's oil facility in its Red Sea port to Saudi oil facilities, and creating a network that goes from the heart of Arabia to the shores of the Mediterranean (Bareket 2020). Another proposes to lay down train tracks that would connect Israel's Mediterranean port in Haifa to ports in the Persian Gulf via Saudi Arabia (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2019).

Conclusion

Israeli geostrategy was shaped in response to the threats and traumas of the 1940s: the Holocaust in Europe, and the war of independence in Israel/Palestine. The complete isolation from a region that refused to accept it deepened Israel's sense of strategic isolation. The state's narrow shape sealed a deep sense of vulnerability. Israel's national security strategy reflects this geostrategic perspective. It stressed deterrence, early warnings, and swift moves to victory on enemy territory. With a dramatic disadvantage in resources compared to the Arab world, this security imperative drove Israel to adopt technologies that could balance the gap. The territorial gains of 1967 did solve some of the geostrategic challenges. However, Israel wanted to hand the new lands (or most of them) back in return for peace and recognition. This was achieved on the Egyptian front, but not on the Syrian one, and not in the West Bank. The net result was that although the physical reality of Israel's geostrategic challenges changed, the fundamental ideas the state's elites held about this reality remained in place.

A real change in Israel's geostrategic posture came about in the 2000s and is ongoing. It comprises four main aspects. First, Israel's traditional threat of a ground invasion by its neighbors has disappeared. This is the result of earlier Israeli territorial

expansion, as well as its growing power and the decline in its neighbors' powers.

Second, Israel is dealing with new threats that are further from its border. It is concerned that the avidly anti-Israeli regime in Tehran is developing a military nuclear capability that might be turned against Israel. However, Iran is located over 1,000 km away. The distance has expanded Israel's geostrategic ambit to include the Persian Gulf and the waterways that connect the two nations.

Third, the sea, a space that was generally an afterthought in Israeli geostrategic thinking, has emerged as an important strategic arena, due to both the conflict with Iran and Israel's newish reliance on natural gas from its EEZ in the Mediterranean

and desalinated water from that sea. Among other things, this new geostrategic horizon begets an Israeli alliance with Greece and Cyprus.

The combined effect of the turn to the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean is that Israel's geostrategic self-image is undergoing a profound change. Once a fortified island surrounded by a hostile environment, the Jewish state now sees itself as being somewhat focused on connectivity with the region and between its various parts.

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