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Deposited in DRO:

20 June 2019

Version of attached file:

Accepted Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Jones, Clive (2015) 'Israel's security nexus as strategic restraint : the case of Iran 2009–2013.', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 41 (1-2). pp. 160-180.

Further information on publisher's website:

<https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2015.1104668>

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Israel's Security Nexus as Strategic Restraint The Case of Iran 2009-2013

Abstract

This article examines the debates in Israel between 2009 to 2013 over Iran's nuclear programme as a reflection of a particular type of civil-military or civil-security relationship. It analyses how key actors within that relationship - particularly those with an intelligence background - engaged with media outlets in Israel and further afield to influence domestic and international opinion over how best to contain Iran's nuclear ambitions. In so doing, it seeks to address one fundamental question: are governments in Jerusalem any longer the final arbiters over deciding what is in the national security interests of the State of Israel?

Key Words: Israel, Civil-Military Relations, Nexus, Security, Intelligence.

Introduction

On 5 November 2012, Israel's Channel 2 investigative programme *Uvda* (Fact), broadcast a feature alleging that two years previously - the exact date remained unclear - Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and the former Minister of Defence, Ehud Barak, gave orders for the Israeli Air Force to begin preparations for a strike against Iran's nuclear facilities. The order, issued as a 'P-Plus', a designation that indicates action in readiness for war, was met with immediate resistance from the Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General Gabi Ashkenazi, the Head of Israel's external intelligence agency, the *Mossad*, Meir Dagan as well as Yuval Diskin, head of Israel's internal security agency, the *Shabbak*. Indeed, Dagan was reported to have told both Netanyahu and Barak that 'You are likely going to make an illegal decision to

go to war. Only the cabinet is authorised to do this'.¹ The former Defence Minister, speaking on the same programme, denied that 'P Plus' necessarily meant that such preparations indicated that an attack was likely, and rejected the allegation that any veto over military action, not least on the basis of a position taken by the Chief of Staff, prevented the political echelon within government from authorising an attack.

A later statement widely attributed to Dagan that Netanyahu had tried to 'steal a war' certainly added context to the extraordinary comments made by Dagan to a group of selected journalists on the very day he relinquished his position as head of the Mossad on 6 January 2011.² Rather than the usual valedictory speech followed by anodyne questions, Dagan, according to one of those present, launched a scathing attack on the belligerent sabre rattling that he felt had come to define Netanyahu's policies and rhetoric towards Iran's nuclear programme. For Dagan, not only was talk of Tehran constituting an existential threat to the existence of the Jewish State exaggerated, the apparent drift towards unilateral preventive military action placed Jerusalem increasingly at odds with Washington whose military and diplomatic support remains the bedrock of Israeli security. Moreover, should such an attack be launched, the inevitable estrangement from Washington and Europe following on from a *preventative* action of questionable legality under international

¹ Gili Gohen, 'Israel's Security Chiefs rejected orders to prepare for Iran strike in 2010', *Ha'aretz* (in Hebrew), 4 November 2012. The story was very quickly picked up by the foreign media. See for example Sheera Frenkel, 'I'm ready for war with Iran says PM, after army vetoed attack orders', *The Times*, 6 November 2012; Harriet Sherwood, 'Israel "planned Iran attack" in 2010', *The Guardian*, 5 November 2010.

² Interview with Dr Ronen Bergman, Chief Correspondent for Security and Intelligence Affairs for *Yediot Aharonot*, Tzhala, Tel Aviv, 1 August 2013.

law would inevitably invite regional retaliation – not least on part of Iran’s close proxy Hezbollah - but with Israel seemingly devoid of any tangible diplomatic assets with which to mitigate its own recourse to the use of overwhelming military force in return. Certainly, Dagan’s statement just five months later that an Israeli military strike against Iran would be a ‘stupid thing’, a remark made publicly during the course of an academic conference at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in May 2011, was of a piece with his continued concern that the Israeli premier remained fixated on a course of action whose portends did not bode well for the future security of the State.³

For some in Israel, Dagan’s outspoken comments were welcomed, casting as they did an unflatteringly light on a Prime Minister and Defence Minister all too willing to allow historical analogy to inform current strategic thinking. Yet while senior officers within the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) and the intelligence services have found Netanyahu’s use of the Holocaust a somewhat crude rhetorical device in an attempt to rally world opinion, some directed their ire at Dagan for, as one put it,

³ Ethan Bronner, ‘A former spy chief questions the judgement of Israeli leaders’, *The New York Times*, 3 June 2011; Yossi Melman, ‘Ex-Mossad chief Dagan: Military Strike against Iran would be ‘Stupid’’, *Ha’aretz* (in Hebrew), 8 May 2011. Well before Dagan’s outspoken remarks, another former head of the Mossad, Efraim Halevy had warned of the untold consequences of an attack on Iran that could last for a 100 years and as such, should only be considered as a last resort. See ‘Ex-Mossad chief says strike Iran could “affect us for 100 years”’, *Ha’aretz* (in English), 26 July 2008. This view contrasted with that of his erstwhile colleague and predecessor as head of the Mossad, Shabtai Shavit who in 2008 suggested that Israel had only a year to destroy Iran’s nuclear programme. See ‘Former Israeli spymaster: we have a year to hit Iran nukes’, *Ha’aretz* (in English), 29 June 2008.

'washing Israel's dirty laundry in public'.⁴ To be sure, the debates over the likelihood or otherwise of an Israeli strike against Iran's nuclear facilities have now abated somewhat, the more constructive atmosphere following the agreement reached between the P5+1 and Tehran over the lifting of sanctions in exchange for robust monitoring of Iran's nuclear programme being largely responsible. Even so, Jerusalem has made it clear that a viable military option remains on the table should Iran, having successfully diluted what has been a harsh sanctions regime, subsequently be discovered to still be developing a nuclear programme whose aim, ultimately, is to realise a nuclear weapons capability.

Examining the actual scope and intent of Iran's nuclear ambitions and Israel's likely response is not the object of this article however. Rather, by focusing upon the period 2009-2013 when a unilateral strike by Israel appeared to be a real possibility it seeks to examine the debates among and between Israel's security elite over how to confront the Iranian nuclear programme. Conceptually, these debates have gone beyond the established typology used previously to describe civil-military or civil-security relationships in Israel to encompass how key actors, particularly within the realm of intelligence engaged with, used, and in some cases abused ties to global media outlets - not least in the United States - in order to try and influence both public debate at home and international opinion abroad over how best to contain Iran.

⁴ Interview with Major General (Res) Amos Yadlin, Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), Tel Aviv, 29 July 2013. Yadlin is currently the Director of the INSS. In 1981, he was one of the IAF pilots involved in the destruction of the Iraqi nuclear reactor at Osiraq and between 2006 and 2010 he was Director of Agaf Modi'n (Military Intelligence Directorate of the IDF)

Taking as its starting point the idea of the security-network as a form of epistemic community (rather than a theory of civil-military relations in Israel), and based on primary source interviews with senior military and intelligence officials in Israel as well as close analysis of relevant secondary source material, this article examines the extent to which Israeli government debate and policy towards Iran's nuclear programme was influenced by what it terms a 'security nexus'. This security nexus used media outlets to shape internal and external public discourse over that strategy, a discourse which in turn informed the perceptions of state actors in Europe and North America. Moreover, the use of global media outlets by Dagan in particular to air his concerns over the likely consequences of unilateral Israeli action against Iran was but a logical extension of how, from the premiership of Ariel Sharon onwards, Israeli intelligence officials *in particular* (my emphasis) increasingly played to a public gallery that had, hitherto, been kept in relative ignorance of their very identity, let alone their actual activities, clandestine or otherwise on behalf of the state.

The broader question that the article seeks to address is ultimately the influence exercised by a security nexus that justifies its actions in defence of Israel, maintains contact with the bureaucracies of state, but ultimately, through the use of global media outlets, operates beyond its sovereign control on matters related to national security. In short, on issues of strategic, yet alone existential concern, this article examines the extent to which elected Israeli governments can actually remain the sole arbiters on deciding what is, and what is not in the national security interest of the State.

From Security Network to Security Nexus

Not surprisingly for a state and society that has lived in various forms of protracted conflict with its neighbours, the literature dealing with civil-military relations in Israel is as vast as it is varied. Even so, the debates follow a continuum, ranging from what Oren Barak and Gabriel Sheffer have termed 'Traditional Approaches' that posit a military and its attendant institutions and structures formally subservient to the state, to more critical appreciations that highlight the fungible nature of the supposed boundaries that separate the military and civilian spheres beloved of such traditionalists.⁵ Such critical approaches highlight the functional nature of the relationship between the political and military spheres, not just in the process of 'parachuting' when senior officers made a seemingly effortless transition into party politics and government, but more importantly, in how the language and dominant discourse of security determined the scope and level of resource extraction by a professional military elite that reinforced the privileged position of the IDF in Israeli society.⁶

⁵ For a traditional account of Israel's civil-military relations see Amos Perlmutter, *Politics and the Military in Israel 1967-77* (London: Frank Cass, 1978). More critical accounts are to be found in Uri Ben Eliezer, *The Making of Israeli Militarism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Yoram Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room: How the Military Shapes Israeli Policy* (Washington, D.C: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2006). Some academics have identified what they refer to as 'waves' in the study of civil-military relations in Israel. Foremost among these scholars is Stuart Cohen. See Stuart Cohen, *Israel and its Army: From Cohesion to Confusion* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp.1-15.

⁶ Oren Barak and Gabriel Sheffer, 'The Study of Civil Military Relations in Israel', in Oren Barak and Gabriel Sheffer, *Militarism in Israeli Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), pp.17-18.

With its intellectual debt to the post-modernist tradition very much to the fore, New Critical Approaches focus more upon the cultural underpinnings of civil-military relations in Israel, making the claim that the securitised nature of the state as it has emerged over seven decades of conflict has denied sufficient agency to civil society to counter what they see as the undeniable militaristic tone of public discourse across Israel.⁷ Like the Critical Approaches, the New Critical Approaches move beyond a model of civil-military relations based upon a rigid institutional and structural arrangements. The emphasis instead is placed upon the 'informal political and social relationships' between the political and military spheres that highlights the 'cultural dimensions' of an interface that at its core privileges a military culture. But because of the incomplete nature of the very process of state formation, a situation exacerbated by the legacy of the June 1967 war and the exact dominion to be claimed over the occupied territories, Barak and Sheffer conclude that the conceptual basis of both the Critical and New Critical Approaches towards understanding the nature of civil-military relations in Israel remains constrained precisely because they remain grounded in a Western intellectual tradition that has taken insufficient account of the Israeli condition.⁸

Taking as their conceptual point of departure, Barak and Oren went on to develop the idea of a 'security network' as key to understanding contemporary civil-military relations in Israel, and not least in an era when the proportion of former

⁷ Barak and Sheffer, 'The Study of Civil-Military Relations in Israel', in *Militarism in Israeli Society*, pp.18-21.

⁸ Barak and Sheffer, 'The Study of Civil-Military Relations in Israel', in *Militarism in Israeli Society*, p.21.

high ranking army officers actually serving in government - a manifestation of parachuting - has been much diminished. As they argue:

Our approach is to view these (civilian and military) sectors as consisting of many actors that intermingle very closely and form a highly informal policy network – the Security Network. This analytical and theoretical approach takes into consideration the increased penetration of active and retired personnel of the security sector into most of the civilian sphere, which it seems has no parallel [elsewhere] in effective democratic states, and which, moreover, is not balanced by control of the state’s security sector.⁹

Noting that such networks are the inevitable result of a particular process of state formation under conditions of perpetual conflict and regional atrophy, they conclude by adding that ‘Our concept of Israel’s security network thus connotes a complex and fluid type of relationship between security and civilian actors, but one that is ultimately capable of shaping the policymaking process as well as determining concrete policies.’ The most obvious example of this cited by Barak and Sheffer is opposition to proposed defence cuts in which the epistemic weight of the security network has often proved decisive in warding off the more substantive savings demanded by successive Israeli finance ministers.¹⁰

The security network approach developed by Barak and Sheffer does offer a more sophisticated account of civil-military relations in Israel, not least because the very term can account for the role of intelligence, and the increasing public roles

⁹ Barak and Sheffer, ‘The Study of Civil-Military Relations in Israel’, in *Militarism in Israeli Society*, p.25.

¹⁰ Oren Barak and Gabriel Sheffer. ‘Israel’s “Security Network” and its impact: an exploration of a new approach’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 38/2 (2006), pp.251-53. The argument was elaborated still further in Gabriel Sheffer and Oren Barak, *Israel’s Security Networks: A Theoretical and Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

played by serving and former senior members of Israel's intelligence agencies – Directorate of Military Intelligence (*Agaf Modi'in*), the *Mossad* and the *Shabbak* – to be included as part of such a network. That said, the framework developed by them probably carries more weight in terms of its analytical value than as a theoretical construct. Indeed, one obvious criticism is that Barak and Sheffer impute a unity of purpose as well as influence to the network that remains consistent over a range of issues, rather than contingent on the very context surrounding any one or a number of issues. The controversy for example surrounding the documentary film *The Gatekeepers* would suggest that despite the deeply held view of six former heads of the *Shabbak* that Israel's continued occupation of the West Bank was untenable, internal political considerations of an often visceral if not ideological nature continue to determine actual state policy towards the Palestinians.¹¹ For the purposes of this article, the salient point is not only the lack of unity between these former practitioners and the politicians – dissonance that has perhaps been consistent if hidden over time – but why such dissonance has now spilled over in to the public domain. As will be noted later, this particular *zeitgeist* is very much the result of a shift in the nature of security-media relations that dates back to the *al-Aqsa* intifada.

¹¹ *The Gate Keepers* (שומר י הסף) Directed by Dror Moreh, Cinephil, Israel, released 2012. A longer version of the documentary was broadcast in Israel where, inevitably it proved controversial, not least among some former security officials who felt the comments expressed were a betrayal of those who had operated under the command of those interviewed. Nonetheless, it was met with widespread international acclaim and was nominated for the category of Best Documentary in the 2012 Academy Awards.

As such, it is perhaps more accurate to develop the idea of a ‘security nexus’ which emerged in response to the more bellicose stance of Netanyahu. This nexus is defined here as a tangible connection between an epistemic community and the actual issue involved so that members of this community coalesce around their interest or expertise and unite in their desire to effect an outcome as it relates to the specific issue at hand. This moves the debate beyond the idea of a ‘network’ posited by Barak and Sheffer. While they highlight the intimate nature of a network that cuts across both civilian and military spheres, it remains intangible much beyond their emphasis upon the influence it wields over the allocation of budgets and resources to the defence and security sector. Indeed, their analysis is too parsimonious in its approach, embracing as it does a reductionism that does not move much beyond describing the informality of these ties.¹²

By contrast, the focus on a ‘nexus’ highlights the contingent nature of the relationship between those that constitute the nexus and the issue involved. The nexus therefore constitutes individuals who may profoundly disagree on a range of other issues but share a platform to exert particular influence over a shared concern at a particular time. In short, the nexus is not just about the scope of the individual relationship but how the cumulative effect of the relationship links to and influences a given issue. This linkage or engagement might be temporary and indeed might well fracture precisely because of the short-term nature and scope of interest of the

¹² For example, see Guy Rolnik, ‘Is Israel’s defense establishment a giant interest group?’, *Ha’aretz* (in English) 28 January 2014. In this interview, Sheffer concluded that the security network worked to entrench a particular understanding among the Israeli public of the conflict with the Palestinians that helped in the process of resource allocation.

constituency concerned. Even so, in the case of the debate over Iran, this security nexus was defined by 1) the epistemic weight and therefore influence the intelligence backgrounds of members of the nexus in particular could exercise among target audiences and 2) the ability of its members on this single issue of Iran to connect with and influence public debate both in Israel but equally importantly, across Europe and North America through effective use of global media outlets. In short, the concern expressed by so many retired Israeli security officials associated with this nexus - a concern that utilised a symbiotic relationship that had come to mark intelligence-media relations in Israel over the previous decade - proved influential, as later conceded by Barak, in hardening Washington's opposition towards any unilateral strike by Jerusalem against Tehran.¹³

Media-Security Relations in Israel

As with the changing nature of civil-military relations in Israel, those between the media and security establishment have, as Yoram Peri noted, developed over time, shaped by historical context, technological innovation and changes to the very social composition of Israel itself. Once a loyal partner in the process of state creation and consolidation and where the reified nature of security determined what Peri termed a process 'deferential journalism', security-media relations from the 1980s onward began to become more hostile as the justification

¹³ Barak actually complained that opposition to an attack that was felt at an elite level was precisely because of what he termed a 'public scare campaign'. Gide Weitz, 'Former PM Barak: To go nuclear, Iran is waiting for the world to be paralysed', *Ha'aretz* (in Hebrew), 16 January 2015.

for the recourse to force, as well as how the IDF conducted itself came under increased public scrutiny. In part the shift was an inevitable response to the political events surrounding both the October 1973 war and nine years later, the public outcry across Israel following its invasion of Lebanon.¹⁴

Equally however, the shifting eddies of Israel as a society suggested a populace less deferential and more willing to voice outright scepticism of received wisdoms as they related to security issues. This reflected the decline of a centre-left political order that had always enjoyed a monopoly over the media outlets. The election in 1977 of Israel's first right-wing led coalition government for many marked the decline of *mamlachtiyut* – that particular form of Israeli statism – in which the media had, hitherto, largely been subservient to parties of the centre left that had constituted the natural order of government. While privately owned newspapers came to dominate the print media, the advent of cable and digital platforms across Israel and with it, the deregulation of broadcasting from the 1990s onwards, exposed Israelis to a global array of news sources that made it increasingly difficult for the successive governments – that had previously relied upon military censors – to exercise a monopoly over the scope of security debates across Israel. As Peri noted, 'Training accidents, commanders' behaviour, service conditions, promotions, disagreements and power struggles in the military, criminal acts, corruption in the security system, all these and more, which in the past would never have become public knowledge, were addressed in great detail in the 1990s.'¹⁵

¹⁴ Yoram Peri, 'The Media and the Military: From Collusion to Collision', in Stuart A. Cohen (ed), *Democratic Societies and their Armed Forces* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), pp.186-87.

¹⁵ Peri, 'The Media and the Military', p.191.

Yet in one area of security, media scrutiny remained absent by design rather than default: intelligence. To be sure, in most democratic states, media access to intelligence agencies remains limited at best, the perception being that as Shlomo Shpiro observed, 'intelligence work depends on secrecy for its success', and as such, 'should be kept out of the media entirely'. In the case of Israel, this had become almost an article of faith, leading to what Shpiro termed a 'controlled exclusion model' in which the Mossad in particular had always looked to 1) suppress operational revelations 2) threaten or punish uncooperative media outlets 3) use of the media where necessary to enhance Israeli deterrence.¹⁶ This was not always entirely successful. The media exposure of the murder of a Palestinian terrorist by *Shabbak* officers *after* the successful storming of a hijacked bus in April 1984, despite claims that all the terrorists had been killed during the actual course of the rescue operation remains the most salient example. As a rule however, the trinity that underpins the 'exclusion model' has long circumscribed the extent to which journalists can probe independently the operational, as well as legal jurisdictions of Israel's intelligence community. As journalist and intelligence historian, Dr Ronen Bergman argued, coverage of Israel's intelligence community remains opaque at best, with no effective public oversight even of the annual budget devoted to intelligence which should fall within the purview of the sub-committee of the Foreign and Intelligence committee of the Israeli Knesset.¹⁷

¹⁶ Shlomo Shpiro, 'Media Strategies of Intelligence Services', *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 14/4 (2001), pp.494-95.

¹⁷ Interview with Dr Ronen Bergman, Chief Correspondent for Security and Intelligence Affairs for *Yediot Aharonot*, Tzhala, Tel Aviv, 1 August 2013.

But while the totem of national security has long determined media access to the IDF and intelligence services, relatively little has been written over the extent to which senior security officials have now developed and used media connections to express particular positions or indeed, articulate alternative perspectives on a given issue that may run counter to the policies of the elected government of the day. In part, the ability of senior security officials to do so, not least within the intelligence services, was a product of the very secrecy and clandestine activity surrounding their work: the idea of privileged access to the inner thoughts and views of intelligence operatives is by its nature, seductive. This however is context rather than cause. For the tendency of senior security officials in Israel to be more forthcoming on issues of strategic as well as operational concern is as much a product of how the very nature of government relations with the media has developed over the past decade.

Until the al-Aqsa intifada, it was a truism that the IDF and intelligence agencies were answerable to the government, not to the public with advice given behind closed doors. Yet the typology of violence visited upon Israelis by various Palestinian militant groups, not least of which was the use of suicide bombers against civilian targets inside Israel proper created a widespread sense of insecurity among Israelis which, despite the best efforts of the IDF and intelligence services - appeared endemic. The public perception that the niceties of international diplomacy prevented the government of Ariel Sharon from using the full might of the IDF to deliver a crushing blow to the Palestinian militant groups was best expressed in the rash of car bumper stickers extolling the government to 'Let the IDF win'. This sentiment found a more emotive articulation in the words of the then IDF Chief of

Staff, Lieutenant General Moshe Ya'alon, who in comments made before the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee noted that the Palestinians would have to internalise the fact that terrorism would not 'defeat us, will not make us fold'. He continued:

If that deep internalization does not exist at the end of the confrontation, we will have an existential threat to Israel. If that is not burned into the Palestinian *and* [my emphasis] Arab consciousness, there will be no end to their demands on us.That's why this confrontation is so important. There has not been a more important confrontation since the War of Independence.¹⁸

The idea implicit in this statement that the al-Aqsa intifada represented a existential threat best dealt with by pursuing absolute victory may have enjoyed public approbation but it did not reflect a sober appreciation of political realities or indeed strategic possibilities. In 2003, the influential address by the then serving head of the Shabbak, Avi Dichter to the annual Herziliya conference can be seen as a palliative to Ya'alon's more strident war claims, reminding his audience that while significant successes has been scored against Palestinian militant groups, security could never be absolute.¹⁹

The importance of Dichter's speech was less however in the actual message than in the fact that it was delivered in an open forum and aimed directly at the Israeli public. It was the first time that a serving head of one of Israel's security

¹⁸ Ari Shavit, 'The enemy within', *Ha'aretz Magazine* (in English) 30 August 2002. Ya'alon has since gone on to become a Likud Knesset Member and Minister of Defence. While still noted for his hard line attitudes towards security, he does advocate a political settlement with the Palestinians.

¹⁹ Uri Ben Eliezer, *Old Conflict, New War: Israel's Politics towards the Palestinians* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p.165. According to this account and with the blessing of Ariel Sharon, Dichter told his surprised audience, 'One has to say with candour: the security establishment and the Shin Bet did not provide the nation of Israel with the protective vest it deserved'.

services had made a such statement at the behest of the serving Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, while a conflict was *ongoing* (my emphasis) regarding the limits of Israeli power. Crucially, in giving this address, Dichter became a powerful player in the interface between the government and the public, in effect becoming a means by which Israeli governments now justified security policy, with the 'authority' of intelligence in particular used to validate often difficult decisions as they related to national security.²⁰ Such cover became even more visible in the actions of Prime Ministers Ehud Olmert and his successor, Benjamin Netanyahu over the price Israel was will to pay to secure the release of Gilad Shalit, an IDF conscript abducted in the summer of 2006 by members of Hamas close to the border with the Gaza strip. The advice given to Olmert by Yuval Diskin, Dichter's successor as director of the *Shabbak*, not to condone the asymmetric release of Palestinian prisoners to secure the release of Shalit was made public, giving political cover to the Prime Minister's position as public pressure mounted for his freedom. Equally, Netanyahu again made known the recommendations of the *Shabbak* when, in 2011, Shalit was released by his captors in exchange for 1027 Palestinians held in Israeli gaols.²¹

For Efraim Halevy, former director of the *Mossad* between 1998 and 2002, the precedent set by Dichter back in 2003 had a profound impact not just on relations between government and security agencies, but in the dynamic that has now come to shape perceptions of the intelligence services in the public domain. Senior figures in the intelligence services now had what he termed a new 'client', the court of public opinion. As such, public opinion now had an increasing impact on

²⁰ Interview with Ambassador Efraim Halevy, Ramat Aviv, Israel, 1 August 2013.

²¹ Interview with Ambassador Efraim Halevy, Ramat Aviv, Israel, 1 August 2013.

reputations and indeed legacies of senior security officials that are increasingly subject to media scrutiny. In this new environment, these security officials in turn proved equally keen to court the media.²² Accordingly, Halevy's successor, Meir Dagan was feted by Ehud Olmert in front of the national press towards the end of his rather acrimonious tenure as Prime Minister. Indeed, lacking the status of the first generation of politicians and nation builders and tarnished, however unfairly, by his conduct of the 2006 war with the Hezbollah, Olmert looked to recover trust in his security decision-making by courting clear practitioner endorsement. In turn, this boosted the public status of the security practitioner – in this case Dagan – while concurrently, nurturing public acceptance of the practice of officials and former officials expressing open opinions on matters of national security.

Stating that the people of Israel owed Dagan a great debt of gratitude (and perhaps hoping too that these not so subtle hints over Dagan's clandestine successes might, for a man mired in corruption allegations, offer him some mitigation in the court of public opinion) Olmert again allowed the head of an intelligence agency a platform for wider engagement with the public, not least over policy towards Iran. Indeed, throughout Dagan's tenure as Director of the *Mossad*, a series of what one senior security official called 'Whispers' was allowed to filter down through selected media outlets to the wider Israeli public, a process designed to assuage concern over Tehran's nuclear ambitions.²³ These whispers included un-attributable leaks to

²² Interview with Ambassador Efraim Halevy, Ramat Aviv, Israel, 1 August 2013.

²³ A case in point is Israel's destruction of the Syrian nuclear reactor at Al-Kibar in north eastern Syria, close to the Euphrates in September 2007. Several discreet leaks were made to overseas news outlets which were quickly picked up by news agencies in Israel regarding a mysterious air raid on an

the media regarding the assassination of key Iranian personnel associated with the Iranian nuclear programme, as well as details of 'Stuxnet', a computer virus developed allegedly by the United States National Security Agency in collaboration with the CIA, and the 8200 of *Agaf Modi'in*, which infected the centrifuges used by Iranian scientists to enrich uranium.²⁴

Having therefore come out of the intelligence closet, public opinion in Israel now had the potential to shape the reputation of security chiefs, undermining the hitherto long-standing principle that such officials remain beholden to the government, rather than the people as intelligence officials became sensitive to issues surrounding their legacy. Whereas previously, only the Director of Military Intelligence would appear before the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Intelligence Committee, the dropping of the veil of secrecy over the chiefs of the *Shabbak* and *Mossad* now saw them subject to the judgement of the wider Israeli society. Equally however, this exposure to the court of public opinion allowed security officials a platform upon which to engage increasingly in more open debate on defence and security issues once they have left office. Nowhere has this been more powerfully seen than in the very public way former (and some serving) security officials - the security nexus - engaged with and indeed used a variety of media outlets, both

unidentified target in Syria. The story eventually appeared in *Ha'aretz* and the *New Yorker* magazine in 2012. See Yossi Melman and Dan Raviv, 'Revealed for the first time: A mission in Syria that never took place', *Ha'aretz* (in English), 10 August 2012; David Makovsky, 'The Silent Strike: How Israel bombed a Syrian nuclear installation and kept it secret', *The New Yorker Magazine*, 17 September 2012, pp.24-40.

²⁴ On the impact of the Stuxnet virus in particular see Sean Rayment, 'Cyber Wars' *The Sunday Telegraph*, 26 June 2011.

national and international to deliver often stinging critiques of the approach and policies of the Netanyahu government towards halting Iran's nuclear programme.

The 'Nexus' as Security Restraint

In September 2010, the *Atlantic Monthly* in the United States published an article by one of its most noted columnists, Jeffrey Goldberg, titled 'The Point of no Return'. Consisting of a series of reported discussions with senior Israeli officials and culminating in the recorded comments of Prime Minister Netanyahu over Iran's nuclear programme, the article was seen widely at the time as preparing opinion both in Israel and the United States for the increased likelihood of a unilateral strike against Tehran's nuclear facilities by the end of that year or early 2011. Impatience with what he perceived as a weak sanctions regime and the reluctance of the Obama Administration to engage with a security threat widely seen in Israel as of equal menace to the security of the Gulf states as well as the regional interests of the United States underscored Netanyahu's position.²⁵

Little over 16 months later, a similar article of equal stridence - this time an interview by Ronen Bergman with the then Defence Minister Ehud Barak - was published in *The New York Times*. While noting the undoubted clandestine successes scored against the Iranian nuclear programme, ranging from infecting centrifuges at the Natanz reactor with the stuxnet computer virus through to the assassination of key scientists and the sabotage of military installations associated

²⁵ Jeffrey Goldberg, 'The Point of no Return', *The Atlantic Magazine*, September 2010 at

www.theatlantic.com/magazine/print/2010/09/the-point-of-no-return/8186 Accessed 6 September 2010.

with the programme, the article concluded that such measures could only delay, rather than halt the progress of Tehran's nuclear ambitions. Bergman concluded his piece by declaring that:

After speaking with many Israeli leaders and Chiefs of the military and intelligence, I have come to believe that Israel will indeed strike Iran in 2012. Perhaps in the small and ever diminishing window that is left, the United States will choose to intervene after all, but here, from the Israeli perspective, there is not much hope for that. Instead, there is that peculiar Israeli mixture of fear – rooted in the sense that Israel is dependent on the tacit support of other nations to survive – and tenacity, the fierce conviction right or wrong, that only the Israelis can ultimately defend themselves.²⁶

Between the publication of these two interviews however, something profound happened to the security discourse in Israel. Of course, the issue of how to deal with Tehran's nuclear ambitions and crucially, the advisability of a preventive strike against its key facilities was one that cut across ideological and party loyalties in Israel.²⁷ Public debate over military operations is of course widespread in Israel but this, for the most part has been *after* the fact.²⁸ The debate over Iran's nuclear

²⁶ Ronen Bergman, 'Will Israel attack Iran', *The New York Times*, 25 January 2012 at

www.nytimes.com/2012/01/29/magazine/will-israel-attack-iran.html?

Accessed 22 July 2013.

²⁷ Interview with former member of the National Security Staff, Tel Aviv 31 July 2013. This individual had extensive experience of dealing with Iran. Name withheld on request.

²⁸ One comparable example is what has been called the 'revolt of the generals', when, in the run up to the June 1967, senior IDF officers made it clear to the public that Israel's security was being undermined by the timidity of the elected politicians. The argument that the IDF effected bullied the government of Levi Eshkol into condoning pre-emptive strikes against Syria and Egypt, action that usurped civilian control of the military has however been challenged by more recent scholarship. See

programme was very different, not least because it has been conducted *before* the fact and involved outright opposition from what have been called *Le'sheavar* (the Formers) a euphemism for ex-security officials and how, in turn, use of the media by this security nexus turned increasingly toward a global audience in order to influence and/or pressure the elected government of the day in the courts of both domestic and international opinion.²⁹

The term nexus, rather than network to describe those opposed to unilateral Israeli action might appear to be the semantic equivalent of splitting hairs. But in this case at least it serves a discrete purpose, highlighting, as outlined previously, an alignment of security officials – both serving and retired and most with intelligence backgrounds – concentrated upon one issue of existential importance to the State. This sets it apart from a 'security network' as described by Barak and Oren whose emphasis, however informal, remains largely focused on resource allocation shared by serving and former security officials over time and where unity of purpose defines broad policy goals. This is not the case with the position taken by the security nexus over Iran. Public statements made by Dagan, for example, have been criticised by other retired security officials who have argued they damaged Israel's deterrent credibility (if not its capability). Former Director of Military Intelligence (DMI), Amos Yadlin called such statements unethical, noting that if Dagan had felt so deeply about government policy towards Iran during his tenure as *Mossad* director he should have resigned. During his own tenure as DMI, Yadlin felt aggrieved that having invested

Mordechai Bar-On, 'The Generals "Revolt": Civil-Military Relations in Israel on the Eve of the Six Day War', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 48/1 (2012), pp.33-50.

²⁹ Interview with former member of the National Security Staff, Tel Aviv 31 July 2013

so much treasure and man hours trying to penetrate the Iranian programme, Dagan's actions, de facto, had given Tehran access to policy debate in Jerusalem virtually for free.³⁰

Even so, the politics of personality clearly played a part in much of this often bitter dialogue. Perhaps the most stinging criticism of Netanyahu and former Defence Minister Barak came from Yuval Diskin, director of the *Shabbak* between 2005-2011. Along with Dagan and Ashekenazi, he was known to have opposed unilateral action against Iran while in office, concerned in particular that any decision to attack had not been discussed or condoned by the security cabinet.³¹ Reflecting on his time in office and his dealings with several Israeli Prime Ministers and Cabinet members, Diskin opined during the course of an interview with the popular Israeli newspaper *Yediot Aharanot* that, 'Unfortunately, my feeling, like the feeling of many others in the defence establishment is that for Netanyahu and Barak, personal, opportunistic interests come first.' He continued:

It's easy, all you need to do is decide – lets strike Iran. But once we've entered such circumstances, would they, these two, Bibi (Netanyahu) and Barak - be capable of actually attaining the desired results for the State of Israel? Seeing as I have these people in quite a few operations and under various circumstances in the current term and in the past, I and many of my colleagues do not feel secure in their ability to lead such a move. We don't feel comfortable with their motives.³²

³⁰ Interview with Major General (Res) and former Head of *Agaf Modi'n* (Military Intelligence Directorate of the IDF) Amos Yadlin, Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), Tel Aviv, 29 July 2013

³¹ Amos Harel, 'Former Mossad chief briefed comptroller about Iran strike plans', *Ha'aretz* (in Hebrew), 2 December 2011.

³² Dror Moreh, 'Diskin: Bibi, Barak motivated by personal interests', *Yediot Aharanot* (in Hebrew) 6 January 2013.

It was a view shared by a former Director of Military Intelligence, Major General Uri Saguy. He too was candid in his assessment of what he saw as the rhetorical excesses of Netanyahu and Barak towards Iran, likening it to someone who lights a fire and then demands it be put out by others. He continued that the 'either or scenarios' depicted by Netanyahu were 'blatantly unreasonable'.³³ While of a piece with the opinions expressed by Dagan, it was Diskin's acerbic views however that quickly drew the ire from those within the wider security establishment as well as those within the media concerned over the net effect such comments had upon Israel's deterrent capability. By undermining the impression of purpose and unity at the heart of Israel's security establishment, the danger was, as Ari Shavit, a columnist with *Ha'aretz* noted, that it would lessen pressure on Washington and the Europeans to enforce a tight sanctions regime to offset a likely attack if the Israeli threat lacked credibility.³⁴

But while the arguments of Diskin and Dagan reflected an earnest belief that Netanyahu was preparing to launch a strike without due consideration of the regional consequences, this was only part of the issue. The fact that they were able to express their concerns and views in such a public manner was the inevitable consequence of shifts in the relationship between the security establishment and the media, shifts that were initially encouraged by party and personal interests in

³³ Amir Oren, 'Former Israeli intelligence chief: Netanyahu and Barak dangerously stoking flames of war', *Ha'aretz* (in English), 17 August 2012.

³⁴ Tony Karon, 'Israel's "Threat" to bomb nuclear facilities is central to its Iran strategy', at <http://globalspin.blogs.time.com/2011.07/22/israels-threat-to-bomb-nuclear-facilities-is-central-to-its-iran-strategy/#ixzz1Sqf7mT60> 22 July 2011 accessed on 25 July 2011.

government but which now had moved beyond government control. The result, as the debate over striking Iran intensified across Israel, was that men like Diskin and Dagan used their media skills and profile acquired while in government service, to now push alternative agendas that may or may not be to the benefit of state security. As Efraim Halevy noted:

The current balance of media relations with the security-intelligence community is not healthy: who is using who? Who is accountable to who? Mechanisms of [Israeli] government accountability are not fit for purpose in that many feel that the former security chiefs are omnipotent, that they themselves are above the fray and because of their position and expertise they are not accountable to the political echelon.³⁵

But as a former head of the *Mossad*, Halevy too appeared in the Israeli media to criticise the tone of the language (but not the decision-making process itself) used by Netanyahu in trying to shape public attitudes towards the potential use of force against Iran. Constant reference for example to the Holocaust had been counterproductive Halevy felt, conveying the impression of a brittle state faced by an existential threat soon to enter what Barak referred to as a 'zone of immunity' from attack. While acknowledging that a nuclear Iran would be a grave matter for Israel, he stated in an interview with *Ha'aretz* in September 2012 that:

I am absolutely appalled when I hear our leaders talking as though there were no Israel Defence Forces and as though there were no State of Israel and as though Auschwitz is liable to be repeated. As I see it, the message we should be conveying to the Iranians – and to ourselves - is that we will be here in any event and in any scenario for the next two thousand years.³⁶

As influential as such interviews have been in shaping Israeli domestic opinion – and opinion polls taken between 2011-13 suggested a slim majority of

³⁵ Interview with Ambassador Efraim Halevy, Ramat Aviv, Israel, 1 August 2013.

³⁶ Ari Shavit, 'Former Mossad Chief: An attack on Iran likely to foment a generations long war', *Ha'aretz* (in English), 1 September 2012.

Israelis remained opposed to any unilateral strike without the express support and better still, involvement of the United States - the permissive media environment described by Halevy now saw members of the security nexus embrace a wider global audience.³⁷ Throughout 2012, Dagan in particular was the focus of attention in two consecutive articles in the *New Yorker* magazine published in September of that year, a magazine in the United States known for its Democratic party sympathies.

At a time when the personal, let alone diplomatic ties between the first Obama presidency and Netanyahu were testy at best, this was no coincidence. The first article, written by David Remnick focused upon Dagan but was in effect an expose of the fractious relations that had developed between so many within Israel's security establishment on the one hand, and Netanyahu and Barak on the other. The second, which followed 14 days later, gave extensive details of the reasoning and rationale behind Israel's destruction of the Syrian nuclear facility at al-Kibar, an action undertaken when Dagan headed the Mossad and enjoyed a close working relationship with the incumbent Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert. The inference was clear: the security nexus could and would sanction strikes where necessary and carefully calibrated. What Barak and Netanyahu proposed however was unnecessary precisely because the perceived gains had not been measured against

³⁷ See for example the poll conducted by the Israel Democracy Institute (Peace Index) in February 2012. From a sample of 600 respondents, 62.9 per cent of those Israelis questioned opposed an attack on Iran *without* the support of the United States. The poll data can be accessed at https://owa.dur.ac.uk/owa/redirect.aspx?C=SjCElXlsn0Kn7gcnTa0rjni2FgcGy9IIIbetzPrZzmZkTK3KFh27cWYI28WtITnINxw6Oj_lk4A.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.peaceindex.org%2ffiles%2fThe%2520Peace%2520Index%2520Data%2520-%2520February%25202012.pdf Accessed 25 September 2015. See also 'Ha'aretz Poll: Israelis split over military operation against Iranian nuclear facilities', *Ha'aretz* (in English), 3 November 2011.

the likely political, military and indeed human costs.³⁸ Indeed, while no one doubted that Israel had the ability to actually hit an array of targets in Iran, their ability to sustain an air campaign of the required duration and intensity to lasting damage remained doubtful. The distance to be flown by the IAF would place limits on the number of sorties with adverse consequences for the actual time over target across multiple sites, even with the use of standoff weaponry. Any damage inflicted would most likely be repaired relatively quickly by a regime who no doubt would have already incorporated a level of redundancy into their programme in anticipation of such an attack.

Equally damaging perhaps would be the international opprobrium faced by Jerusalem for launching a preventative, as opposed to a pre-emptive strike that would be deemed illegal under international law, whose military effectiveness without Washington's involvement was doubtful, and whose adverse impact on Israel's ties across the region as well as wider relations with Europe and, most importantly, the United States would likely be profound.³⁹ This argument in

³⁸ See David Remnick, 'Letter from Tel Aviv: The Vegetarian – A notorious spymaster becomes a dissident', *The New Yorker Magazine*, 3 September 2012, pp.22-28; Makovsky, 'The Silent Strike: *The New Yorker Magazine*, pp.24-40.

³⁹ Max Fisher, 'The UK thinks a strike on Iran would be illegal; denies US access to its bases', *The Washington Post*, 25 October 2012. Sensitive to the controversy surrounding its decision to support Washington in Afghanistan and more controversially, in the invasion of Iraq, the coalition government of David Cameron allegedly made it clear that even if the Obama Administration decided to launch air strikes against Iran, the UK would deny the United States access to 'British airbases that are strategically located on remote islands'. This oblique reference to Diego Garcia was apparently contained in a legal advice circulated to the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Ministry of

particular weighed heavily on the minds of those like Amos Yadlin, the former Director of Israeli military intelligence who otherwise felt that the diplomatic fall-out from any preventative attack could be managed and indeed, that any strike might be welcomed by many in the Sunni-Arab world and Gulf states in particular. In an interview published in September 2012 however, he warned that '[O]ur legitimacy battery is almost empty. Above all, we must cease butting heads with the United States and try to reach a strategic understanding with it. Israel must shape a policy and take action to ensure that, if we are compelled to attack, the world will be behind us on the day that we do so'.⁴⁰

Much of this argument, analysis and debate had appeared regularly in the Hebrew press between 2009-12 as well as in online English versions of *Ha'aretz* and *Yediot Aharonot*, giving these articles a wider audience and therefore reach in North America and Europe. But even more profound were the television interviews given by Dagan to the prime time CBS current affairs programme *60 Minutes* on 8 March 2012 and three months later to the BBC World News Television Programme *Hardtalk*. As networked international news stations, the opinions of the former Mossad director were now readily accessible to a global audience and in English.⁴¹

On reflection, this may have been a calculated gambit on the part of Dagan for quite Defence which, while conceding that Iran had been engaging in illegal uranium enrichment, this was not clear evidence of intent to build a nuclear weapon.

⁴⁰ Ari Shavit, 'Former Intelligence Chief breaks his silence on Iran', *Ha'aretz* (in Hebrew), 13 September 2012.

⁴¹ The interviews are still available on You Tube. The CBS *60 Minutes* interview can be accessed at <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=1eC6oCmvQ0> ; The BBC *Hardtalk* interview can be accessed at <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=7b-Ed-9FyRM>

reasonably, he could, given his previous position at the very apex of Israel's intelligence community, have made private entreaties to the White House. Instead, by appearing on high profile news programmes, he deliberately appealed to the wider public in North America, making the risk of the United States being dragged into another Middle East war a real possibility for a country scared deeply by the invasion of Iraq and the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan, and for a President committed to the withdrawal of all United States troops from Iraq and Afghanistan by the end of his Presidency.

Of such appearances on global news networks, Ehud Barak noted bitterly that the likes of Dagan 'travel the world, and their words weaken the considerable achievement of Israeli policy where we made the Iranian issue a major, urgent issue, not only for Israel but for the world'.⁴² The irony of course is amid the rancour and acrimony between the government and security nexus, the end result can be used to justify the means both sides chose to impede Iran's nuclear programme. For Netanyahu, the harsh rhetoric, the signalled preparations that involved, for example, large scale air exercises over the Eastern Mediterranean, and his now infamous appearance before the UN security waving a cartoon caricature of a bomb to indicate how close Tehran was to attaining a nuclear weapons capability, did convince all it could be argued of Israel's earnest intentions should Tehran nuclear ambitions remain unchecked. The severity of the sanctions regime subsequently imposed upon Iran by the United States and the European Union therefore can be seen as vindication of this strategy, although even with the signing of the recent

⁴² Natan Sachs, 'Israel's Spy Revolt', *Foreign Policy*, 10 May 2012, at

http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/05/10/israels_spy_revolt? Accessed 14 May 2012.

accord between the P5+1 and Iran in Lausanne, Netanyahu remains convinced of Iran's continued nuclear malfeasance.⁴³

Equally, the Security Nexus could claim, with equal validity, that its actions have prevented a strike on Iran whose outcome could well have embroiled Israel in a regional conflagration whose outcome would have been far from certain, while allowing the international community time to construct a new security regime capable of containing Iran. Indeed, The United Kingdom seemed keen in particular to demonstrate to Jerusalem and indeed the wider Israeli public that these efforts went beyond the purely diplomatic endeavours of the P5+1. In the summer of 2012 when fears of an Israeli strike were most pronounced in Washington and London, the *Daily Telegraph* disclosed on its front page details of a 'private speech' by Sir John Sawers concerning the success achieved by the British Secret Intelligence Service or MI6 in thwarting Tehran's attempts to obtain a nuclear weapons capability.⁴⁴ Perhaps more striking however were the apparent revelations contained in a *Mossad* report, subsequently shared with their South African

⁴³ This was certainly the view of Ronen Bergman who believed that his article for the *New York Times Magazine* with Ehud Barak was taken very seriously by former US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta who feared increasingly that Israel was preparing to strike between April and July 2012. Bergman believes that as a result, the White House, while placing pressure on Netanyahu to desist from any military action, redoubled its efforts to impose harsher sanctions against Iran. Interview with Dr Ronen Bergman, Chief Correspondent for Security and Intelligence Affairs for *Yediot Aharanot*, Tzohar, Tel Aviv, 1 August 2013. See also Amos Harel, 'Bottom Line of Congress Speech: Iran Strike off the Table', *Ha'aretz*, 6 March 2015.

⁴⁴ Christopher Hope, 'We foiled Iranian nuclear weapons bid, says spy chief', *The Daily Telegraph*, 13 July 2012.

counterparts in October 2012 and leaked just over two years later to the *The Guardian* newspaper and *Al-Jazeera* that claimed Tehran did 'not appear ready' to enrich uranium to the 90 per cent required to build a nuclear weapon. This was a position that clearly stood at odds with Netanyahu's more dire assessment.⁴⁵ Such revelations aside however, the security nexus recognised that even in this apparent era of American retrenchment from the Middle East, the political and strategic ties with Washington remain the very foundation upon which Israeli defence policy rests. Any attack by Israel on Iran without the express permission of Washington would therefore likely have incalculable consequences for Israel's future security. Indeed, given what many regard as Israel's development of its own deterrent capability based on a nuclear triad, living with a nuclear Iran might well be price worth paying when set against the potential loss of Washington as an ally.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ See a Seamus Milne. 'Secret cables reveal Israel's spies at odds with Netanyahu on Iran', *The Guardian*, 24 February 2015. These revelations were part of a larger tranche of cables released by Wikileaks. Having left office over a year previously, it is unlikely Dagan would have had knowledge of this assessment although it clearly tilted towards his overall analysis.

⁴⁶ Several recent memoirs published by senior military officials and policy-makers in London and Washington suggest that the threat of an Israeli preventative strike were taken seriously. In his autobiography, Lieutenant General Sir David Richards, former Chief of the British Defence Staff disclosed that the likelihood of such a strike was deemed by London to be around 40-50 per cent in the summer of 2012. See David Richards, *Taking Command* (London: Headline Publishing, 2014), pp.324-25. During a visit to Europe in February 2012, former US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta disclosed to David Ignatius of *The Washington Post* that he feared an Israeli strike within the next four months. Despite Panetta's insistence that this was a private discussion, the subsequent story made international headlines and certainly contributed to the added diplomatic momentum towards

But whether one takes the view that Iran is an existential threat that must be confronted, or a strategic challenge which, however malevolent towards Jerusalem, can be contained, the cumulative impact on state-security relations over how to deal with Tehran has been profound. A combination of a shift in the very nature of civil military relations, coupled with the shifting contours in the relationship between government, the media and senior intelligence officials in particular has now created a genie that cannot be put back easily in the bottle.

Conclusion

On taking up his post as Director of the Mossad in 1998, Efraim Halevy was only too well aware of the damage done to the intelligence agency by excessive media interest following the botched attempt by two of its operatives to assassinate Hamas leader, Khaled Meshal in Amman, Jordan. As a consequence, he was determined to keep media intrusion surrounding Mossad operations to an absolute minimum, arguing that 'Intelligence is a plant that can only grow in darkness' and that absolute secrecy remained the bedrock of operational success'. He concluded that '[O]ur ethos is not to be in contact with the media'.⁴⁷

While Halevy's words clearly pertained to operational matters, they have a contemporary resonance when examining the idea of a security nexus and how, as a distinguished epistemic community in that very realm, it can exercise influence (if not power) on an international scale. Indeed, debate over how Israel identifies and

a harsher sanctions regime against Iran. See Leon Panetta, *Worthy Fights: A Memoir of Leadership in War and Peace* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), pp.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Shpiro, p.499.

follows the contours of its own security needs became a global issue where Iran was concerned, and one partly elevated to that international plane by the changing nature of the relationship described between the elected government on the one hand, and the media and security officials on the other. The Iran crisis accelerated (although did not cause) a shift away from responsibility of senior officials to the elected government of the day, and towards a reciprocal relationship with the public filtered through, at times, an all too indulgent media.

There is of course the irony that for many in Israel and the wider world, the security nexus as described has been influential in preventing a wider regional conflagration rather than its professional diplomats or indeed elected politicians. More recently, other senior security officials too have raised their concerns over what one referred to as 'Netanyahu's needless fear mongering when it comes to Iran's atomic aspirations'. Brigadier-General Uzi Eilam who for over a decade headed the Israel Atomic Energy Commission cast doubt on whether Iran even wanted to develop nuclear weapons, let alone possessed the technical ability to do so immediately. Instead, he felt it more likely that Tehran would prefer to remain a threshold state, able to exercise regional influence through latent fear that could intimidate its neighbours but without incurring the military wrath of Washington.⁴⁸ Given his own background in the development of Israel's own nuclear and missile programmes and his access to the intelligence assessments surrounding Iran's nuclear programme, his epistemic authority was of a piece with that of the security nexus described.

⁴⁸ Ronen Bergman, 'Ex-atomic agency chief: Netanyahu using scare tactics on Iran nuclear programme', *Yediot Aharonot* (in Hebrew), 15 May 2014.

In August 2015 Ehud Barak revealed, albeit inadvertently, that between 2009 and 2012 Israel came closer to attacking Iran on four occasions.⁴⁹ With the signing of the nuclear agreement between the P5+1 and Iran in July 2015, the risk of such strikes has been much reduced although should Tehran be found to be in material violation of the accords Israel has made it clear it reserves the right to act in defence of its national interests. But the essential dilemma for Jerusalem and its influence on the future patterns of civil-military and civil-security relationships in Israel remains: the influence (if not power) exercised by a security nexus that is unelected, accountable to few, but able to effect the security and foreign policy of the elected government of the day on issues of existential/strategic concern. Given the nature of overall public trust in government in Israel, it is a dilemma that is unlikely to be resolved anytime soon.

⁴⁹ Barak David, 'Barak: Steinitz, Ya'alon thwarted Iran Strike in 2011', *Ha'aretz*, 23 August 2015; Jodi Rudoren, 'Israel came close to attacking Iran, Ex-Defense Minister says', *The New York Times*, 21 August 2015.

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