



ISRAEL, IRAN AND *PROJECT DANIEL* A SIX-YEAR RETROSPECTIVE

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The views expressed in this six-year retrospective are those of Professor Louis René Beres, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of any other members of Project Daniel, or of any government.

In the increasingly urgent matter of Iranian nuclearization, one core question emerges: *Has Israel already run out of time?* Exactly six years ago, our small group of Israeli and American strategists issued an informed and authoritative set of recommendations. Today, some of these recommendations (first made public in May 2004/see below) may have become problematic, but they are also by no means less valid or less valuable. Rather, they still warrant very close and careful study, especially as a new American president now enters the White House.

Here, then, is both the brief history and the intellectual substance of Project Daniel. **Israel's Strategic Future: The Final Report of Project Daniel** was first presented by hand to then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon on January 16, 2003². The underlying rationale of this report was the plausible presumption that Israel needed a coherent plan for dealing with particular existential threats, and that we ("The Group") were well-positioned to design such a plan. We began our

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² See *Israel's Strategic Future: Project Daniel*, Ariel Center for Policy Research (ACPR), ACPR Policy Paper No. 155, Israel, May 2004, 64 pp. This document was originally prepared only for confidential presentation to the Prime Minister, and not intended for publication.

work with an overriding concern for the possible enemy fusion of WMD-capacity (especially nuclear) with irrational adversaries. Contrary to this particular policy starting point, however, **Project Daniel** ultimately concluded that the primary threats to Israel's survival were actually more likely to arise among certain *rational* enemies.

Throughout our work, The Group examined a broad variety of complex issues concerning deterrence; defense; preemption and war fighting. Combining legal with strategic analyses, we linked the concept of "anticipatory self-defense" to various preemption scenarios and to *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (September 20, 2002). We also examined closely the prospects for expanded strategic cooperation between Washington and Jerusalem, with particular reference to maintaining Israel's "qualitative edge" and to associated issues of necessary funding. **Project Daniel** looked very closely at a recommended "paradigm shift" to deal with various "low intensity" and long-range WMD threats to Israel, and also considered the specific circumstances under which Israel should purposefully end its current posture of "nuclear ambiguity". Overall, The Group urged continuing constructive support to the United States-led War against Terror (WAT)³ and stipulated that Israel combine a strengthening of multilayered active defenses with a credible, secure and decisive nuclear deterrent. This recognizable retaliatory (second-strike) force was recommended to be fashioned with the capacity to destroy some 10 – 20 high-value targets scattered widely over pertinent enemy states in the Middle East – an objective entirely consistent with our explicit assumption that the main goal of Israel's nuclear forces must always be deterrence *ex ante*, not revenge *ex post*.

The Group recognized a very basic asymmetry between Israel and the Arab/Iranian world concerning, *inter alia*, the desirability of peace; the absence of democracy; the acceptability of terror as a legitimate weapon and the overwhelming demographic advantage of the Arab/Iranian world. With this in mind, **Israel's Strategic Future** concluded that non-conventional exchanges between Israel and adversary states must always be scrupulously avoided and that Israel should do whatever is needed to maintain its conventional supremacy in the region. Facing a growing anarchy in world affairs and an increasing isolation in the world community, Israel was strongly encouraged by **Project Daniel** to incorporate The Group's considered recommendations into codified IDF doctrine, and also to systematically expand Israeli strategic studies into a more disciplined field of inquiry. In the end, we affirmed, Israel's survival will depend largely upon strategic policies of its own making, and these policies will be best-informed by The Group's proposed steps regarding deterrence; defense; war-fighting and preemption options. Today, with the still-steadily advancing nuclear threat from Iran, the preemption option has likely become simultaneously *more compelling* and operationally *more difficult* (See, for example, Louis René Beres and MK/Major General (IAF/Res.) Isaac Ben-Israel, "Think Anticipatory Self-Defense", *The Jerusalem Post*, October 22, 2007).⁴

³ See, on terrorism, L.R. Beres, "The Legal Meaning of Terrorism for the Military Commander", *Connecticut Journal of International Law*, Spring 1996; and L.R. Beres, "The Meaning of Terrorism: Jurisprudential and Definitional Clarifications", *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law*, February 1995.

⁴ We also remain fully aware that any future preemptive action against Iranian nuclear assets and infrastructures would be vastly more operationally difficult than Osiraq. See, for example, Louis René Beres and Yoash Tsiddon-Chatto, "Reconsidering Israel's Destruction of Iraq's Osiraq Nuclear

Israel, Sun-Tzu and the Art of War

Although The Group's collaborative analyses drew explicitly upon very contemporary strategic thinking, we were also mindful of certain much-earlier investigations of war, power and survival. One such still-relevant investigation can be found in Sun-Tzu's *The Art of War*.

Sun-Tzu's *The Art of War*, written in the fifth century BCE, synthesized a coherent set of principles designed to produce military victory and minimize the chances of military defeat. Examined together with **Israel's Strategic Future**, the Final Report of *Project Daniel*, the full corpus of this work should now be studied closely by all who wish to strengthen Israel's military posture and its associated correlation of forces/order of battle. At a time when the leaders of particular Arab/Islamic states might soon combine irrationality with weapons of mass destruction, the members of **Project Daniel** were determined to augment current facts and figures with dialectical reasoning, intellectual imagination and analytic creativity.

Israel, we reported, must continue its "imperative to seek peace through negotiation and diplomatic processes wherever possible". Indeed, we continued: "This imperative, codified at the United Nations Charter and in multiple authoritative sources of international law, shall always remain the guiding orientation of Israel's foreign policy." What are Sun-Tzu's favored principles concerning negotiation and diplomacy? Political initiatives and agreements may be useful, he instructs, but purposeful military preparations should never be neglected. The primary objective of every state should be to weaken enemies without actually engaging in armed combat. This objective links the ideal of "complete victory" to a "strategy for planning offensives". In Chapter Four, "Military Disposition", Sun-Tzu tells his readers:

One who cannot be victorious assumes a defensive posture; one who can be victorious attacks.... Those who excel at defense bury themselves away below the lowest depths of Earth. Those who excel at offense move from above the greatest heights of Heaven.

Project Daniel took note. Today, with steadily more menacing Iranian nuclearization, the whole world should take note. But, to date, so-called "sanctions" have been a mere parody of corrective action.

Recognizing the dangers of relying too heavily upon active defenses such as anti-ballistic missile systems, a reliance whereby Israel would likely bury itself away "below the lowest depths of Earth", **Project Daniel** had advised that Israel take certain prompt initiatives in removing existential threats. These initiatives included striking first (preemption) against enemy WMD development, manufacturing, storage, control and deployment centers – a recommendation fully consistent with longstanding international law regarding "anticipatory self defense" and also with the declared defense policy of the United States.⁵

Reactor", *Israel's Strike Against the Iraqi Nuclear Reactor*, Menachem Begin Heritage Center, June 7, 1981, Jerusalem, Israel, September 2003, pp. 59-60.

⁵ See, for example, L.R. Beres, "In Support of Anticipatory Self-Defense: Israel, Osiraq and International Law", *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 19., No. 2., August 1998, pp. 111-114; L.R. Beres, "Israel and Anticipatory Self-Defense", *Arizona Journal of International and Comparative Law*, Vol. 8., 1991, pp. 89-99; L.R. Beres, "Israel, Force and International Law: Assessing Anticipatory Self-Defense", *The Jerusalem Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 13, No. 2., June 1991; and L.R. Beres, "After the

If, for any reason, the doctrine of preemption should fail to prevent an enemy Arab state or Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, the Daniel Group advised the Prime Minister that Israel cease immediately its established policy of deliberate nuclear ambiguity, and proceed at once to a position of openly-declared nuclear deterrence. Additional to this change in policy, we recommended that Israel make it perfectly clear to the enemy nuclear state that it would suffer prompt and maximum-yield nuclear “counter-value” reprisals for *any level* of nuclear aggression undertaken against Israel.

Under certain circumstances, our team continued, similar forms of Israeli nuclear deterrence should be directed against enemy states that threaten existential harms with biological weapons.

What exactly are “existential harms”? Taken literally, an existential threat implies harms that portend a complete annihilation or disappearance of the state. We had felt, however, that certain more limited forms of both conventional and unconventional attack against large Israeli civilian concentrations could also constitute an existential threat. In part, our calculation here was based upon Israel’s small size, its very high population density and its particular concentrations of national infrastructure. In essence, if the present Government of Israel were to follow the expressed advice of Project Daniel, prospective aggressors would understand fully and in advance that launching certain kinds of attack against Israel would turn their own cities to vapor and ash.

Following Sun-Tzu, the clear purpose of our recommendation was to achieve a complete Israeli “victory” without engaging in actual hostilities. In the exact words of our report, **Israel’s Strategic Future**: “The overriding priority of Israel’s nuclear deterrent force must always be that it preserves the country’s security without ever having to be fired against any target.”

To preserve itself against any existential threats, some of which may stem from terrorist organizations as well as from states, Israel – we reasoned – should learn from Sun-Tzu’s repeated emphasis on the “unorthodox”. Drawn from the conflation of thought that crystallized as Taoism, the ancient strategist observes: “...in battle, one engages with the orthodox and gains victory through the unorthodox.” In a complex passage, Sun-Tzu discusses how the orthodox may be used in unorthodox ways, while an orthodox attack may be unorthodox when it is unexpected. Taken together with the recommendations of Project Daniel, this passage could still represent a subtle tool for Israeli operational planning, one that might usefully exploit an enemy state’s or terrorist group’s particular matrix of military expectations.

For Israel, said The Group, the “unorthodox” should be fashioned not only *on* the battlefield, but also *before* the battle. To prevent the most dangerous forms of battle, which would be expressions of all-out unconventional warfare called “counterforce” engagements, Israel should examine a number of promising strategic postures. These postures could even focus upon a reasoned shift from an image of “orthodox” rationality to one of somewhat “unorthodox” irrationality, although **Project Daniel** did confine itself to prescriptions for certain defensive first-strikes using conventional weapons and for certain massive counter-value (counter-city) nuclear reprisals.

Before **Project Daniel** there was the so-called “Samson Option”. Everyone who seriously studies Israeli nuclear strategy had long heard about this biblical image and idea. The Samson Option is generally thought to be a last resort strategy wherein Israel’s nuclear weapons would be used not

for prevention of war or even for war-waging, but rather as a last spasm of vengeance against a despised enemy state that had launched massive (probably unconventional) counter-city and/or counterforce attacks against Israel. In this view, Israel's leaders, faced with national extinction, would decide that although the Jewish State could not survive, it would "die" only *together with* its destroyers. (For a recent assessment of the "Samson Option", see: Louis René Beres, "Israel and Samson: Biblical Lessons for Israeli Strategy in the Nuclear Age", *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 11, No. 3, July 2005, pp. 491-503.)

How does the "Samson Option" appear to the Arab/Iranian side? Israel, it would seem, may resort to nuclear weapons, but only in reprisal, and only in response to overwhelmingly destructive first-strike attacks. Correspondingly, anything less than an overwhelmingly destructive first-strike would elicit a measured and proportionate Israeli military response. Moreover, by striking first, the Arab/Iranian enemy knows that it could have an advantage in "escalation dominance". These calculations would follow from the more or less informed enemy view that Israel will never embrace the "unorthodox" on the strategic level, that its actions will likely always be reactions, and that these reactions will always be limited.

But what if Israel were to fine-tune its "Samson Option"? What if it did this in conjunction with certain doctrinal changes in its longstanding policy of nuclear ambiguity? By taking the bomb out of the "basement" and by indicating, simultaneously, that its now declared nuclear weapons were not limited to existential scenarios, Israel might still go a long way to enhancing its national security. It would do this by displaying an apparent departure from perfect rationality; that is, by expressing the *rationality of threatened irrationality*. Whether or not such a display would be an example of "pretended irrationality" or of an authentic willingness to act irrationally would be anyone's guess. It goes without saying that such an example of "unorthodox" behavior by Israel could actually incite enemy first-strikes in certain circumstances, or at least hasten the onset of such strikes that may already be planned, but there are ways for Israel in which Sun-Tzu's "unorthodox" could be made to appear "orthodox". Today, six years after completion and presentation of Project Daniel, it is time for scholars to explore these ways with real care and in real operational detail.

How a Nuclear War Might Begin Between Israel and Its Enemies

The more things change, the more they remain the same. Israel remains the openly declared national and religious object of Arab/Islamic genocide. This term is used here in the literal and jurisprudential sense – not merely as a figure of speech. No other country is in a similar predicament.

What is Israel to do? How might Israel's possible actions or inactions affect the likelihood of a regional nuclear war in the Middle East? And in what precise ways might a nuclear war actually begin between Israel and certain of its enemies? Here are some of Project Daniel's original responses:

Israel's nuclear weapons, unacknowledged and unthreatening, exist only to prevent certain forms of enemy aggression. This deterrent force would never be used except in defensive reprisal for certain massive enemy first strikes, especially for Arab and/or Iranian attacks involving nuclear and/or biological weapons. For a limited time, Israel's enemies are not yet nuclear. Even if this

should change, Israel's nuclear weapons could continue to reduce the risks of unconventional war as long as the pertinent enemy states were (1) to remain rational; and (2) to remain convinced that Israel would retaliate massively if attacked with nuclear and/or certain biological weapons of mass destruction.

But there are many complex problems to identify if a bellicose enemy state were allowed to acquire nuclear weapons, problems that belie the seemingly agreeable notion of stable nuclear deterrence. Whether for reasons of miscalculation, accident, unauthorized capacity to fire, outright irrationality or the presumed imperatives of "*Jihad*,"⁶ such a state could opt to launch a nuclear first-strike against Israel in spite of the latter's nuclear posture. Here, Israel would certainly respond, to the extent possible, with a nuclear retaliatory strike. Although nothing is publicly known about Israel's precise targeting doctrine, such a reprisal might surely be launched against the aggressor's capital city or against a similarly high-value urban target. There would be no assurances, in response to this sort of aggression, that Israel would limit itself to striking back against exclusively military targets or even against the individual enemy state from which the aggression was launched.

What if enemy first strikes were to involve "only" chemical and/or biological weapons? Here, the Group understood, Israel might still launch a reasonably proportionate nuclear reprisal, but this would depend largely upon Israel's calculated expectations of follow-on aggression and on its associated determinations of comparative damage-limitation. Should Israel absorb a massive conventional first-strike, a nuclear retaliation could still not be ruled out altogether. This is especially the case if: (1) the aggressor were perceived to hold nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction in reserve; and/or (2) Israel's leaders were to believe that non-nuclear retaliations could not prevent national annihilation. Again, **Project Daniel** had determined early on that the threshold of existential harms must be substantially lower than wholesale physical devastation. It would appear that there are no logical or empirical reasons whatsoever to modify this determination.

Faced with imminent and existential attacks, Israel – properly taking its cue (at least in part) from *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* – could decide to preempt enemy aggression with conventional forces. Announced on September 20, 2002, this Bush-era American strategy affirms the enduring reasonableness of anticipatory self-defense under international law. If Israel were to draw upon such authoritative expressions of current U.S. policy, we reasoned, the targeted state's response would determine Israel's subsequent moves. If this response were in any way nuclear, Israel would assuredly undertake nuclear counter-retaliation. If this enemy retaliation were to involve certain chemical and/or biological weapons, Israel might also determine to take a quantum escalatory initiative. *Escalation dominance* could be absolutely vital to Israel's security in the midst of certain strategic crises.

If an enemy state's response to an Israeli preemption were limited to hard-target conventional strikes, it is highly improbable that Israel would resort to nuclear counter-retaliation. On the other hand, said The Group, if the enemy state's conventional retaliation were an all-out strike directed toward Israel's civilian populations as well as to Israeli military targets – an existential strike, for

⁶ See, for example, L.R. Beres, "Religious Extremism and International Legal Norms: Perfidy, Preemption and Irrationality", *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law*, Vol. 39, No. 3, pp. 709-730.

all intents and purposes – an Israeli nuclear counter-retaliation could not be ruled out. Such a counter-retaliation could be ruled out only if the enemy state’s conventional retaliations were entirely proportionate to Israel’s preemption; confined entirely to Israeli military targets; circumscribed by the legal limits of “military necessity”; and accompanied by explicit and verifiable assurances of no further escalation.

It is exceedingly unlikely, we understood, but certainly not inconceivable, that Israel could decide at some point to preempt enemy state aggression with a defensive *nuclear* strike. While circumstances could surely arise where such a defensive strike would be completely rational and also completely acceptable under international law (such a policy *has* been embraced by the United States in Joint Publication 3-12, *Doctrine for Joint Nuclear Operations*, 15 March 2005), it is improbable that Israel would ever permit itself to reach such circumstances. In our view, an Israeli nuclear preemption could be expected only if: (1) Israel’s state enemies had unexpectedly acquired nuclear or other unconventional weapons presumed capable of destroying the Jewish State; (2) these enemy states had made explicit that their intentions paralleled their capabilities; (3) these states were authoritatively believed ready to begin a countdown-to-launch; *and* (4) Israel believed that non-nuclear preemptions could not possibly achieve the minimum needed levels of damage-limitation – that is, levels consistent with its own national survival.

Should nuclear weapons ever be introduced into a conflict between Israel and the many countries that wish to destroy it, some form of nuclear war fighting could ensue. This would be the case so long as: (a) enemy state first-strikes against Israel would not destroy the Jewish state’s second-strike nuclear capability; (b) enemy state retaliations for Israeli conventional preemption would not destroy Israel’s nuclear counter-retaliatory capability; (c) Israeli preemptive strikes involving nuclear weapons would not destroy enemy state second-strike nuclear capabilities; and (d) Israeli retaliation for enemy state conventional first-strikes would not destroy enemy state nuclear counter-retaliatory capability. From the standpoint of protecting its security and survival, this meant that Israel must now take proper steps to ensure the likelihood of (a) and (b) above, and the unlikelihood of (c) and (d).

Both Israeli nuclear and non-nuclear preemptions of enemy unconventional aggressions could lead to nuclear exchanges. This would depend, in part, upon the effectiveness and breadth of Israeli targeting, the surviving number of enemy nuclear weapons, and the willingness of enemy leaders to risk Israeli nuclear counter-retaliations. In any event, the likelihood of nuclear exchanges would obviously be greatest where potential Arab and/or Iranian aggressors were allowed to deploy ever-larger numbers of unconventional weapons without eliciting appropriate Israeli and/or American preemptions.

Should such deployment be allowed to take place, Israel might effectively forfeit the non-nuclear preemption option. Here its only alternatives to nuclear preemption could be a no-longer viable conventional preemption or simply waiting to be attacked itself. It follows that the risks of an Israeli nuclear preemption, of nuclear exchanges with an enemy state, *and* of enemy nuclear first strikes could all be reduced – we had reasoned – by certain timely Israeli and/or American non-nuclear preemptions. These preemptions would be directed at critical military targets and/or at

pertinent regimes. As explained by Project Daniel, the latter option could possibly include dedicated elimination of particular enemy leadership elites and/or certain enemy scientists.⁷

Israel's Policy of Nuclear Ambiguity

Project Daniel examined some of the precise ways in which a nuclear war might actually begin between Israel and its enemies. From the standpoint of preventing such a war, it is essential, we reasoned, that Israel protect itself with suitable policies of preemption, defense and deterrence. This last set of policies will depend substantially upon whether Israel continues to keep its bomb in the “basement”, or whether it decides to change formally from a nuclear posture of “deliberate ambiguity” to one of selected and deliberately partial disclosure. (*An antecedent question asks whether nuclear weapons, disclosed or undisclosed, actually enhance Israeli security. See, for example, Louis René Beres and Zeev Maoz, a dialogue, “Israel and the Bomb”, International Security, Harvard, Vol. 29, No. 1, Summer 2004, pp. 1-4).*

In one respect, the issue is already somewhat moot. Shortly after coming to power as Prime Minister, Shimon Peres already took the then unprecedented step of openly acknowledging (in broad contours, of course) Israel's nuclear capability. Responding to press questions about the Oslo “peace process” and the probable extent of Israeli concessions, Peres remarked that he would be “delighted” to “give up the Atom” if the entire region would only embrace a comprehensive security plan. Although this remark was certainly not an intended expression of changed nuclear policy, it did raise the question of a more tangible Israeli shift away from nuclear ambiguity. Certain public remarks by current Prime Minister Olmert – and also certain recent missile tests in Israel – may have had similarly shifting effects.

Project Daniel recognized that the nuclear disclosure issue is far more than a simple “yes” or “no”. Obviously, the basic question had already been answered by Peres' “offer”. What still needs to be determined is the exact timing of purposeful disclosure and the extent of subtlety and detail with which Israel should actually communicate its nuclear capabilities and intentions to selected enemy states. This issue was central to the deliberations of Project Daniel, which concluded in 2003 that Israel's bomb should remain in the basement as long as possible, but also that it should be revealed in particular contours if enemy circumstances should change in an expressly ominous fashion.

Because the **Project Daniel** report stipulated the need for an expanded Israeli doctrine of preemption, this **Project Daniel** statement on nuclear ambiguity meant that Israel should promptly remove the bomb from its “basement” if – for whatever reason – Israel should have failed to exploit the recommended doctrine of preemption. Today, as Iranian nuclearization seems

⁷ See, on this point, L.R. Beres, “On Assassination, Preemption and Counter-Terrorism: The View From International Law”, Keynote Address, delivered by Professor Beres at the Intelligence Summit, St. Petersburg, March 5, 2007; published in *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, Vol. 21, No. 4., Winter 2008-2009, pp. 694-725; L.R. Beres. “The Newly Expanded American Doctrine of Preemption: Can It Include Assassination”, *Denver Journal of International Law and Policy*, Vol. 31, No. 2., Winter 2002; L.R. Beres, “On Assassination as Anticipatory Self-Defense: The Case of Israel”, *Hofstra Law Review*, Winter 1991, 13 pp; and L.R. Beres, “International Law and the Killing of Imad Mughniyeh”, *The Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2008, pp. 79-84.

a *fait accompli*, deliberate nuclear ambiguity seems still more out-of-date. Nonetheless, this is a very subtle strategic issue that requires immediate and careful attention in capable and authoritative quarters.

Project Daniel understood that the rationale for Israeli nuclear disclosure can never lie in expressing the obvious; that is, that Israel *has* the bomb. Instead, it lies in the critical understanding that nuclear weapons can serve Israel's security in a number of different ways, and that all of these ways could benefit the Jewish state to the extent that certain aspects of these weapons and associated strategies are appropriately disclosed. *The pertinent form and extent of disclosure would be especially vital to Israeli nuclear deterrence.* Exactly what this particular form and extent should be has yet to be determined. It should, therefore, now be considered a question of authentically supreme importance to Israel's strategists.

To protect itself against enemy strikes, particularly those attacks that could carry existential costs, **Project Daniel** recommended that Israel exploit every component function of its nuclear arsenal. The success of Israel's efforts, we acknowledged, will depend in large measure not only upon its chosen configuration of "counterforce" (hard-target) and "counter-value" (city-busting) operations, but also upon the extent to which this configuration is made known in advance to enemy states. Before such an enemy is deterred from launching first-strikes against Israel, or before it is deterred from launching retaliatory attacks following an Israeli preemption, it may not be enough that it simply "knows" that Israel *has* the Bomb. It may also need to recognize that these Israeli nuclear weapons are sufficiently invulnerable to such attacks and that they are aimed at very high-value targets.

In this connection, and as indicated earlier in this six-year retrospective, the Final Report of **Project Daniel** recommended "a recognizable retaliatory force should be fashioned with the capacity to destroy some 15 high-value targets scattered widely over pertinent enemy states in the Middle East." This "counter-value" strategy meant that Israel's second-strike response to enemy aggressions involving certain biological and/or nuclear weapons would be unambiguously directed at enemy populations, not at enemy weapons or infrastructures. Looking over the evolution of pertinent existential threats to Israel over the past six years, it seems that our original recommendation was entirely correct.

It could appear, at first intuitive glance, that Israeli targeting of enemy military installations and troop concentrations ("counterforce targeting") would be both more compelling as a deterrent and also more humane. But it is likely, even plausible, that a nuclear-armed enemy of Israel could regard any Israeli retaliatory destruction of its armed forces as "acceptable" in certain circumstances. Such an enemy might conclude, for example, that the expected benefits of annihilating Israel would outweigh any expected retaliatory harms to its military. Here Israel's nuclear deterrent would fail, possibly with existential consequences.

It is highly unlikely. The Group recognized that any enemy state would ever calculate that the expected benefits of annihilating Israel would be so great as to outweigh the expected costs of its own annihilation. Excluding an irrational enemy state – a prospect that falls by definition outside the logic of nuclear deterrence – all state enemies of Israel would assuredly refrain from nuclear and/or biological attacks upon Israel that would presumptively elicit massive counter-value reprisals. Naturally, this reasoning would obtain only to the extent that these enemy states fully believed that Israel would actually make good on its threats.

Israel's nuclear deterrent, once it were made open and appropriately explicit, would need to make clear to all prospective nuclear enemies the following:

Israel's nuclear weapons, dispersed, multiplied and hardened, are targeted upon your major cities. These weapons will never be used against these targets except in retaliation for certain WMD aggressions. Unless our population centers are struck first by nuclear attack or certain levels of biological attack or by combined nuclear/biological attack, we will not harm your cities.

This reasoning, we knew, will disturb some readers and policy-makers. Yet, the counter-value targeting strategy recommended by **Project Daniel** still represents Israel's best hope for avoiding a nuclear or biological war. It remains, therefore, the most humane strategy available. The Israeli alternative, an expressed counterforce targeting doctrine, would produce a markedly higher probability of nuclear or nuclear/biological war. And such a war, even if all weapons remained targeted on the other side's military forces and structures (a very optimistic assumption) would entail enormously high levels of "collateral damage".

The very best weapons, Clausewitz wrote, are those that achieve their objectives without ever actually being used. This is especially the case with nuclear weapons; Israel's nuclear weapons can succeed only through non-use. Recognizing this, **Project Daniel** made very clear in its Final Report to then Prime Minister Sharon that nuclear war fighting must always be avoided by Israel wherever possible. Nothing has happened in the past five years to in any way change this judgment.

The **Project Daniel** Group recommended that Israel do whatever it must to prevent enemy nuclearization, up to and including pertinent acts of preemption. Should these measures fail, measures that would be permissible under international law as expressions of "anticipatory self-defense", the Jewish state should immediately end its posture of nuclear ambiguity with fully open declarations of counter-value targeting. Again, just how this imperative cessation would take operational shape is a question that now needs to be addressed squarely and expertly in both Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv.

Israel's Survival Amidst Growing Worldwide Anarchy

In our age of Total War, Israel must always remain fully aware of those harms that would threaten its very continuance as a state. Although the Jewish state has always recognized an overriding obligation to seek peace through negotiation and diplomacy wherever possible, there are times when its commitment to peaceful settlement will not be reciprocated. Moreover, as noted by Project Daniel, there are times when the idea of an existential threat may reasonably apply to a particular level of harms that falls well below the threshold of complete national annihilation.

Examining pertinent possibilities, The Group noted three distinct but interrelated existential threats to Israel:

1. Biological/Nuclear (BN) threats from states;
2. BN threats from terror organizations; and
3. BN threats from combined efforts of states and terror organizations.

To the extent that certain Arab states and Iran are now allowed to develop WMD capabilities, Israel may have to deal someday with an anonymous attack scenario. Here the aggressor enemy state would not identify itself, and Israeli post-attack identification would be exceedingly difficult. What is Israel to do in such a confused and urgent crisis situation?

The Group recommended to the former Prime Minister that “Israel must identify explicitly and early on that all enemy Arab states and Iran are subject to massive Israeli reprisal in the event of a BN attack upon Israel.” We recommended further that “massive” reprisals be targeted at between 10 and 20 large enemy cities (“counter-value” targeting) and that the nuclear yields of such Israeli reprisals be in very high range. Such deterrent threats by Israel would be very compelling to all rational enemies, but – at the same time – would likely have little or no effect upon irrational ones. In the case of irrational adversaries, Israel’s only hope for safety will likely lie in appropriate and operationally feasible acts of preemption.

A policy of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD), which once obtained between the United States and the Soviet Union, would never work between Israel and its Arab/Iranian enemies. Rather, the **Project Daniel** Group recommended that Israel *must* prevent its enemies from acquiring BN status, and that any notion of BN “parity” between Israel and its enemies would be intolerable. Accordingly, The Group advised the Prime Minister: “*Israel immediately adopt – as highest priority – a policy of preemption with respect to enemy existential threats.*” Such a policy would be based upon the more limited definition of “existential” described above, and would also enhance Israel’s overall deterrence posture.

Recognizing the close partnership and overlapping interests between Israel and the United States, the **Project Daniel** Group strongly supported the American War Against Terror (WAT). In this connection, we had urged full cooperation and mutuality between Jerusalem and Washington regarding communication of intentions. If for any reason the United States should decide against exercising preemption options against certain developing weapons of mass destruction, Israel must reserve for itself the unhindered prerogative to undertake its own preemption options. Significantly, in view of US inaction since 2003 on the Iran front, and also in direct consequence of the US National Intelligence Estimate on Iranian nuclearization, it now looks as if this particular prerogative may have to be exercised. It should go without saying, simply from the standpoint of comparative force size alone, that the United States Air Force would have been far preferable to the Israel Air Force in undertaking any essential acts of anticipatory self-defense against Iranian nuclear assets and infrastructures. To be sure, the IAF is exceptionally capable, but it is also very small.

The Group began its initial deliberations with the following urgent metaphor in mind: *Israel could face the hazard of a suicide-bomber in macrocosm.* In this scenario, an enemy Arab state or Iran would act against Israel without any ordinary regard for expected retaliatory consequences. Here, in the fashion of an individual suicide bomber who acts without fear of personal consequences – indeed, who actually welcomes the most extreme personal consequence, which is death – an enemy Arab state and/or Iran could launch WMD attacks against Israel with full knowledge and expectation of overwhelming Israeli reprisals. The conclusion to be drawn from this scenario is that Israeli deterrence vis-à-vis “suicide states” would have been immobilized by enemy irrationality and that Israel’s only recourse in such circumstances would have been appropriate forms of preemption.

Israel's Preemption and Nuclear Warfighting Doctrine

Project Daniel understood that international law has long allowed for states to initiate forceful defensive measures when there exists “imminent danger” of aggression. This rule of “anticipatory self-defense” was expanded and reinforced by President George W. Bush’s issuance of *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. Released on September 20, 2002, this document asserted, *inter alia*, that traditional concepts of deterrence would not work against an enemy “whose avowed tactics are wanton destruction and the targeting of innocents...”. As Israel is substantially less defensible and more vulnerable than the United States, its particular right to resort to anticipatory self-defense under threat of readily identifiable existential harms is *beyond legal question*.

Following the Bush doctrine expansion of preemption (a doctrine that is soon likely to be revised toward greater multilateralism by President Barack Obama), The Group suggested to then Prime Minister Sharon that such policy should pertain as well to certain nuclear and/or biological WMD threats against Israel, that this policy be codified as formal doctrine, and that these actions be conventional in nature. Such preemption could be overt or covert, and range from “decapitation” to full-scale military operations. Further, the Group advised that decapitation may apply to both enemy leadership elites (state and non-state) and to various categories of technical experts who would be essential to the fashioning of enemy WMD arsenals, e.g., nuclear scientists. The Group reminded Prime Minister Sharon that any forcible prevention of enemy nuclear/biological deployment would be profoundly different from an Israeli preemption of an existing enemy nuclear/biological force. Attempts at preemption against an enemy that had already been allowed to go nuclear/biological could be far too risky and could even invite an existential retaliation. It was also recommended that any preemption be carried out exclusively by conventional high-precision weapons, not only because they are likely to be more effective than nuclear weapons, but also because preemption with nuclear weapons could be wrongly interpreted as Israeli nuclear first strikes. If unsuccessful, these preemptive strikes could elicit an enemy’s “counter-value” second strike; that is, a deadly intentional attack upon Israeli civilian populations.

The Group advised emphatically that Israel should avoid non-conventional exchanges with enemy states wherever possible. It is still not in Israel’s interest to engage these states in WMD warfare if other options exist. **Israel’s Strategic Future** did not instruct how to “win” a war in a WMD Middle-East environment. Rather, it described what we, the members of Project Daniel, considered the necessary, realistic and optimal conditions for non-belligerence toward Israel in the region. These conditions still include a coherent and comprehensive Israeli doctrine for preemption, war fighting, deterrence and defense.

The Group advised the Prime Minister that there is no operational need for low-yield nuclear weapons geared to actual battlefield use. Overall, we recommended that the most efficient yield for Israeli deterrence and counterstrike purposes be a “counter-value” targeted warhead at a level sufficient to hit the aggressor’s principal population centers and fully compromise that aggressor’s national viability. We urged that Israel make absolutely every effort to avoid ever using nuclear weapons in support of conventional war operations. These weapons could create a seamless web of conventional and nuclear battlefields that Israel should scrupulously avoid.

The Group considered it gainful for Israel to plan for very selective regime targeting in certain residual instances. With direct threats employed against individual enemy leaders and possible others, costs to Israel could be very much lower than alternative forms of warfare. At the same

time, threats of regime targeting could be even more persuasive than threats to destroy enemy weapons and infrastructures, but only if the prospective victims were first made to feel sufficiently at risk.

The Group advanced a final set of suggestions concerning the lawful remedy of anticipatory self-defense. Israel must be empowered with a “Long Arm” to meet its preemption objectives. This meant long-range fighter aircraft with capability to penetrate deep, heavily defended areas, and to survive. It also meant air-refueling tankers; communications satellites; and long-range unmanned aerial vehicles. More generally, it continues to mean survivable precision weapons with high lethality; and also incrementally refined electronic warfare and stealth capacities.

Israel’s Deterrence and Defense Doctrine

The Group strongly endorsed the Prime Minister’s acceptance of a broad concept of defensive first strikes, but just as strongly advised against using his undisclosed nuclear arsenal for anything but essential deterrence. This means that enemy states must always understand that certain forms of aggression against Israel will assuredly elicit massive Israeli nuclear reprisals against city targets. For the moment we still maintain that such an understanding can be communicated by Israel without any forms of explicit nuclear disclosure, but we also recognize that the presumed adequacy of nuclear ambiguity would change immediately if enemy nuclearization anywhere (Iran, of course, still comes most quickly to mind) should become a reality.

Moreover, although both Iran and Israel’s pertinent Arab state enemies certainly share a fundamental antipathy to a Jewish state in their midst, it is also clear that they do not necessarily share any affection for each other. In this connection, Project Daniel’s original recommendation that certain frontline Arab states and Iran could all be targeted following an anonymous existential attack may now need careful reconsideration and revision. After all, in current circumstances, The Group’s original recommendation could be exploited by either set of Islamic enemies to crush the other via Israeli “reprisals”.

Nuclear deterrence, ambiguous or partially disclosed, is essential to Israel’s physical survival. If, for whatever reason, Israel should fail to prevent enemy state nuclearization, it will have to refashion its nuclear deterrent to conform to vastly more dangerous regional and world conditions. But even if this should require purposeful disclosure of its nuclear assets and doctrine, such revelation would have to be limited solely to what would be needed to convince Israel’s enemies of both its capacity and its resolve. More particularly, this would mean revealing only those specific aspects needed to identify the survivability and penetration-capability of Israel’s nuclear forces and the political will to launch these massive forces in retaliation for certain forms of enemy state aggression.

The Group advised the Prime Minister that Israel must always do whatever it can to ensure a secure and recognizable second-strike nuclear capability. Once nuclear ambiguity was brought to an end, nuclear disclosure could play a crucial communications role. The essence of deterrence here would lie in the communication of capacity and will to those who would do Israel existential harm. Significantly, the actual retaliatory use of nuclear weapons by Israel would signify the failure of its deterrent. Recalling the ancient Chinese military thinker Sun-Tzu, who was

mentioned earlier, the very highest form of military success is achieved when one's strategic objectives can be met without any actual use of military force.

To meet its "ultimate" deterrence objectives – that is, to deter the most overwhelmingly destructive enemy first-strikes – Israel must still seek and achieve a visible second-strike capability to target approximately 15 enemy cities. Ranges would be to cities in Libya and Iran, and nuclear bomb yields would still be at a level "sufficient to fully compromise the aggressor's viability as a functioning state". By choosing counter-value-targeted warheads in this range of maximum-destructiveness, Israel could achieve optimal deterrent effect, thereby neutralizing the overall asymmetry between the Arab states/Iran and the State of Israel. *All enemy targets, The Group reasoned, would be selected with the view that their destruction would promptly force the enemy aggressor to cease all nuclear/biological/chemical exchanges with Israel.* Nothing has happened to change this reasoning.

As a professor of international law, I was able to assure The Group that all of our recommendations to the Prime Minister regarding Israeli nuclear deterrence were fully consistent with authoritative international law. On July 8, 1996, the International Court of Justice at The Hague (not known for any specifically pro-Israel sympathies by any means) handed down its Advisory Opinion on *The Legality of the Threat or Use of Force of Nuclear Weapons*. The final paragraph concludes, *inter alia*:

The threat or use of nuclear weapons would generally be contrary to the rules of international law applicable in armed conflict, and in particular the principles and rules of humanitarian law. However, in view of the current state of international law, and of the elements of fact at its disposal, the Court cannot conclude definitively whether the threat or use of nuclear weapons would be lawful or unlawful in an extreme circumstance of self-defense, in which the very survival of a State would be at stake.

The Group advised the Prime Minister in 2003 that Israel must display flexibility in its nuclear deterrence posture in order to contend with future enemy expansions of nuclear weapon assets. It may even become necessary under certain circumstances, we recognized, that Israel should deploy a full "triad" of strategic nuclear forces. For the present, however, we recommended that Israel continue to manage without nuclear missile-bearing submarines. *This recommendation still holds only as long as it remains highly improbable that any enemy or combination of enemies could destroy Israel's land-based and airborne-launched nuclear missiles on a first-strike attack.* Presently, it seems absolutely clear that Israel's strategic retaliatory forces remain fully secure and penetration-capable.

Israel's nuclear deterrent must be backed up by far-reaching active defenses. With this in mind, The Group emphasized that Israel take immediate steps to operationalize an efficient, multi-layered antiballistic missile system to intercept and destroy a finite number of enemy warheads. Such interception would have to take place with the very highest possible probability of success and with a fully reliable capacity to distinguish between incoming warheads and decoys. To the extent possible, Israel has already been successful in meeting this requirement.

Israel's "Arrow" missile defense system involves various arrangements with US Boeing Corporation. The Israel Air Force (IAF), which operates the Arrow, will likely continue to meet its desired goal of deploying interceptors in inventory on schedule. Arrow managers may also sell their product to certain other carefully selected states. This could help Israel to reinforce its

qualitative edge over all adversaries. Israeli engineers are continually taking appropriate steps to ensure that Arrow will function well alongside American “Patriot” systems. The Group advised that IAF continue working energetically on all external and internal interoperability issues. This advice has surely been taken.

In its effort to create a multi-layered defense system, Israel may already be working on an unmanned aircraft capable of hunting-down and killing any enemy’s mobile ballistic missile launchers. Back in 2003, Israeli military officials had begun to interest the Pentagon in joining the launcher-attack project, known formally as “boost-phase launcher intercept” or BPLI. The Group advised the then Prime Minister that Israel undertake BPLI with or without US support, but recognized that gaining such support would allow the project to move forward more expeditiously and with greater cost-effectiveness. Also, enlisting US support for BPLI would represent another important step toward maintaining Israel’s qualitative edge.

Project Daniel underscored the importance of multi-layered active defenses for Israel, but affirmed most strongly that Israel must always prepare to act preemptively before there is any destabilizing deployment of enemy nuclear and/or certain biological weapons. No active defense system can ever be “leak proof”, yet protection of civilian populations in a very small country such as Israel calls for nothing less. (See, for example, Louis René Beres and MK/Major General (IAF/Res.) Isaac Ben-Israel, “The Limits of Deterrence”, *The Washington Times*, November 21, 2007).

Conclusions

Looking back over the original recommendations of Project Daniel, The Group concerned itself with, *inter alia*, the need for an expanded policy of preemption; an ongoing re-evaluation of “nuclear ambiguity”; recognizable preparations for appropriate “counter-value” reprisals in the case of certain WMD aggressions; adaptations to a “paradigm shift” away from classical patterns of warfare; expanded cooperation with the United States in the War Against Terror and in future inter-state conflicts in the Middle East; deployment of suitable active defense systems; avoidance of nuclear war-fighting wherever possible; and various ways to improve Israel’s nuclear deterrence. Along the way we had also explored vital differences between rational and non-rational adversaries; changing definitions of existential harms; legal elements of “anticipatory self-defense;” possibilities for peaceful dispute settlements in the region; budgetary constraints and opportunities; maintaining Israel’s qualitative edge; preparations for “regime targeting;” and implications for Israel of the growing anarchy in world affairs.

Originally, we wrote that **Israel’s Strategic Future** must be understood as a work in progress. In this regard, absolutely nothing has changed. The geo-strategic context within which Israel must still fashion its future is continually evolving, and so, accordingly, must Israel’s strategic doctrine. Ultimately it must be from precisely such doctrine that the Jewish state’s particular policies will have to be abstracted, derived, adjusted and implemented.

Since the presentation of our original document to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon on January 16, 2003, there have been a few minor “victories” in the effort to control WMD proliferation among Israel’s enemies. A case in point may be Libya. At the same time, the circumstances in North

Korea (which has manifest ties to some of Israel's regional enemies), Iran and Pakistan⁸ remain highly volatile and dangerous. There is also still evidence of expanding WMD ambitions in Egypt and Syria. At the level of terrorist groups, which are sustained by several Arab/Islamic states, new alignments are being fashioned between various Palestinian factions and *al-Qa'idah*. The precise configurations of these alignments are complex and multifaceted, but the net effect for Israel – and therefore also for the United States – is unmistakably negative. (See, for example, Louis René Beres and Clare Lopez, “Palestinian *al-Qa'idah* Plans”, *The Washington Times*, December 6, 2006.)

Israel's Strategic Future was founded on the presumption that current threats of war, terrorism and genocide derive from a very clear “clash of civilizations”, and not merely from narrow geo-strategic differences. Today, more than six years after completion of our report, both Israel and the United States remain in the cross hairs of a worldwide Arab/Islamist “*Jihad*” that is basically cultural/theological in nature, and that will not concede an inch to conventional norms of “coexistence” or “peaceful settlement”. This situation of ongoing danger to “unbelievers” is hardly a pleasing one for Jerusalem and Washington, but it is one that must now be acknowledged forthrightly and dealt with intelligently. This means that it must be embedded in any serious theories of strategic survival.

In constructing workable strategies, Israel's thinkers and planners must keep in mind that nothing will be more practical than good theory. In all complex strategy matters, theory is a net. Only those who cast will catch.

The ongoing war in Iraq has demonstrated the evident and substantial weaknesses of US strategic theory, and also of US national intelligence agencies. Israel, too, is not without a history of serious intelligence failure (to wit, Israeli problems in the 2006 Lebanon war), and **Israel's Strategic Future** will require a substantially enhanced intelligence infrastructure together with certain highly refined “backup systems”. Facing still-growing isolation in the “international community”, it will also have to fend for itself more than ever before. In the end, Israel's survival will depend largely upon plans and postures of its own making. (See, for example, Louis René Beres, “After the Falling Rockets from Lebanon: Interrelated Commentaries on Israel's Performance and Survival”, Ariel Center for Policy Research (ACPR), ACPR Policy Paper No. 166, Israel, January 2007, 80 pp.).

Israel's Strategic Future is still fraught with existential risk and danger.⁹ It is essential, therefore, that Israel still approach this uncertain future with utter realism and candor. A nuclear war against the Jewish state would likely be undertaken as a distinct form of genocide,¹⁰ and there

⁸ On related problems involving Pakistan and India, see, L.R. Beres, “In A Dark Time: The Expected Consequences of an India-Pakistan Nuclear War”, *American University International Law Review*, Vol. 14, No. 2, pp. 497-518.

⁹ This danger includes creation of a Palestinian state. See, L.R. Beres, “Implications of a Palestinian State for Israeli Security and Nuclear War: A Jurisprudential Assessment”, *Dickinson Journal of International Law*, Vol. 17, No. 2, Winter 1999, pp. 229-286.

¹⁰ See, for example, L.R. Beres, “Genocide, Death and Anxiety: A Jurisprudential/Psychiatric Analysis”, *Temple International and Comparative Law Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 1996, pp. 281-312; L.R. Beres, “International Law, Personhood and the Prevention of Genocide”, *Loyola of Los Angeles International*

can still be no greater obligation for Israel than to ensure protection from such new crimes against humanity.

It is with the sober understanding that Holocaust can take new forms at the beginning of the 21st century that **Project Daniel** first completed its critical work more than five years ago. But our task is surely far from complete. To the extent that other dedicated and capable friends of Israel should now take the early work of **Project Daniel** as a starting point for their own new strategic investigations, we would all be pleased.

The Project Daniel Group

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MK Isaac Ben-Israel holds a Ph.D. from Tel Aviv University, where he studied mathematics, physics and philosophy. The author of numerous articles and several books on military issues, he has held several senior posts in operations, intelligence and weapons development within the Israel Air Force. In January 1998, he was promoted to Major General and appointed as Director of Defense R&D Directorate in IMOD. Maj-Gen. Ben-Israel, a Member of Knesset and former head of the Israel Space Agency, has been teaching at Tel Aviv University since 1989.

Rand H. Fishbein, Ph.D., received his doctorate, with distinction, in International Relations/Middle East Studies from The Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies SAIS). He was a recipient of two Fulbright Fellowships for Middle East Study at St. Antony's College, Oxford University and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. Currently, **Dr. Fishbein** is President of Fishbein Associates Inc., a public-policy consulting firm based in Potomac, Maryland. **Dr. Fishbein** is a former Professional Staff Member of the US Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee and the US Senate Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee, as well as the former Special Assistant for National Security Affairs to Senator Daniel K. Inouye (D-HI). During his years of service on the staff of the Senate Appropriations Committee, **Dr. Fishbein** conceived of and authored numerous programs and initiatives in support of US national security interests in the Middle East. He was the author of the first sanctions bill targeting the regime of Saddam Hussein ten months before the Iraqi leader invaded Kuwait.

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Yoash Tsiddon-Chatto, Col./Res., Israeli Air Force, was a Member of the 12th Knesset and of the 1991 Madrid Peace Mission. A member of the Israel Society of Aeronautics and Astronautics and of the Society of Experimental Test Pilots, COL. Tsiddon-Chatto served as Chief of Planning and Operational Requirements for the IAF prior to the Six Day War. A member of RAFAEL

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