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# Israel's Uncertain Strategic Future

LOUIS RENÉ BERES

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Israel's Strategic Future: The Final Report of Project Daniel" was completed in mid-January 2003, several months before the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom, and transmitted by hand to then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. The underlying rationale of "Project Daniel" was the presumption that Israel urgently needs a coherent plan for dealing with existential threats, and that we (The Group) were well-positioned intellectually and professionally to propose such a plan. The project was originally based on an overriding concern for the possible fusion of certain weapons of mass destruction (WMD)-capacity with irrational adversaries. Project Daniel concluded, however, that the primary threats to Israel's physical survival were more likely to come from enemies that were not irrational. With this in mind, the members of our study group proceeded to consider a broad variety of complex issues related to deterrence, defense, preemption, and war-fighting.

Combining legal with strategic analyses, The Group linked the concept of "anticipatory self-defense" to various preemption scenarios and to *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (20 September 2002). The study group also closely examined the prospects for expanded strategic cooperation between Washington and Jerusalem, with particular reference to maintaining Israel's "qualitative edge" and 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 Global War On Terrorism 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 is recommended to be fashioned with the capacity to destroy some 10 to 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 and 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/Iran world. With this in mind, Project Daniel concluded that non-conventional exchanges between Israel and adversary states must always be scrupulously avoided and that Israel must 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 is strongly encouraged by members of the study group to incorporate its considered recommendations into codified Israel Defense Force doctrine, and to systematically expand Israeli strategic studies into a more disciplined field of inquiry. In the end, Israel’s survival will depend largely upon 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 a steadily advancing nuclear threat from Iran, the preemption option has likely become even more compelling. At the same time, the enormous operational difficulties that would be associated with preemptive destruction of pertinent Iranian nuclear infrastructures suggest that Israel may ultimately have to rely instead upon expanded and improved nuclear deterrence. It is almost certainly such thinking that occasioned Prime Minister Ehud Olmert’s public remarks about Israel’s nuclear capacity on 11 December 2006. These remarks were assuredly not a “slip of the tongue,” as was reported widely in the media. Rather, pursuant to Project Daniel, they were the entirely logical first-step in taking Israel’s bomb “out of the basement.”

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## *Israel, Sun-Tzu, and The Art of War*

Although The Group's collaborative analyses drew 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*. The following brief section of this article uses Sun-Tzu to elucidate The Group's main ideas and recommendations.

Sun-Tzu's *The Art of War*, written sometime 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 order of battle. At a time when the leaders of particular states might soon combine irrationality with weapons of mass destruction, the members of Project Daniel were markedly determined to augment current facts and figures with dialectical reasoning, imagination, and creativity.

Israel, we reported, must continue its "imperative to seek peace through negotiation and diplomatic processes wherever possible." Indeed, "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 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 the threat of Iranian nuclearization, the whole world is taking note. 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 boldly advises that Israel take certain prompt initiatives in removing existential threats. These initiatives include 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."

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 advises that Israel cease immediately its current policy of nuclear ambiguity, and proceed at once to a position of open nuclear deterrence. (It would seem that Prime Minister Olmert's 11 December 2006 remarks already reflect such advice.) Additional to this change in policy, the study group recommends that Israel make perfectly clear to any enemy nuclear state that it would suffer prompt and maximum-yield nuclear "counter-value" reprisals for any level of nuclear aggression undertaken against Israel. It should be noted that counter-force targeting and nuclear war-fighting are described by Project Daniel as altogether counterproductive for Israel.

Under certain circumstances similar forms of Israeli nuclear deterrence should be directed against enemy states that threaten "existential harms" through the use of biological weapons. What exactly are existential harms? Taken literally, an existential threat implies harms that portend a complete annihilation or disappearance of the state. The study group concluded that certain more limited forms of conventional and unconventional attack against Israeli civilian concentrations could also constitute an existential threat. In part our calculations are based upon Israel's size, high population density, and particular concentrations of national infrastructure. If the government of Israel heeds the advice of Project Daniel, prospective aggressors would understand in advance that launching certain kinds of attack would result in their cities turning to vapor and ash.

Following Sun-Tzu, the clear purpose of our recommendation is to achieve a complete Israeli victory without engaging in actual hostilities. In the words of our report: "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 should learn from Sun-Tzu's repeated emphasis on the "unorthodox." Drawn from the conflation of thought that crystalized 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 our study group, this passage represents a subtle tool for operational planning, one that might usefully exploit an enemy state or terrorist group's particular matrix of military expectations.

For Israel, 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 often described as "counterforce engagements," Israel should examine a num-

ber of promising strategic postures. These postures should focus on a reasoned shift from an image of “orthodox” rationality to one of somewhat “unorthodox” irrationality. Project Daniel does, however, confine itself to prescriptions for certain defensive first-strikes using conventional weapons and massive counter-value (counter-city) nuclear reprisals.

Everyone who studies Israeli nuclear strategy has heard about the so-called “Samson Option.” This is generally thought to be a last resort strategy wherein Israel’s nuclear weapons are used not for prevention of war or even for war-waging, but simply as a last spasm of vengeance against an enemy state that had launched massive (probably unconventional) counter-city and/or counterforce attacks against Israel. In this situation, Israel’s leaders, faced with national extinction, would conclude that even though the Jewish State would not survive, it would “die” together with its destroyers.

How does the “Samson Option” appear to the Arab/Iranian world? Israel, it would seem, may resort to nuclear weapons only as a 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 enemy knows that it could have an advantage in “escalation dominance.” These calculations would be derived from the more or less informed enemy view that Israel will never embrace the “unorthodox” at the strategic level; that its actions will always be reactive, 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 go a long way to enhancing its national security. It would do this by displaying an apparent departure from perfect rationality; in essence, 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 might actually incite enemy first-strikes, or hasten the onset of already planned strikes. There are ways, however, in which Israel could make Sun-Tzu’s “unorthodox” appear as “orthodox.”

### ***How a Nuclear War Might Begin***

Israel remains the openly declared national and religious object of Arab and Islamic genocide. This term is used 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 its enemies?

Israel's nuclear weapons, unacknowledged and unthreatening, exist (as Prime Minister Olmert emphasized in his public remarks) only to prevent certain forms of enemy aggression. This deterrent force would never be used except in defensive reprisal for massive enemy first-strikes, especially if these attacks involved nuclear or biological weapons. For a limited time, Israel's acknowledged enemies are not yet nuclear. Even if this should change, Israel's nuclear weapons might continue to reduce the risks of unconventional war as long as the pertinent enemy states were to remain rational and convinced that Israel would retaliate massively if attacked by nuclear and/or certain biological weapons.

But there are many complex problems to identify if a bellicose enemy 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, such a state could still opt to launch a nuclear first-strike against Israel in spite of the latter's nuclear posture. Israel would certainly respond with a nuclear retaliatory strike. Although nothing is publicly known about Israel's precise targeting doctrine, such a reprisal would surely be launched against the aggressor's capital city or another high-value, urban target. There would be no assurances, in response to this level of aggression, that Israel would limit itself to striking military targets or even to the individual enemy state from which the aggression was launched.

What if enemy first-strikes involved only chemical or biological weapons? Under such circumstances Israel might still launch a proportionate nuclear reprisal, but this would depend upon Israel's calculated expectations of follow-on aggression and associated determinations of comparative damage-limitation. Even if Israel were to absorb a massive conventional first-strike, nuclear retaliation could not be ruled out. This is especially true if the aggressor were perceived to hold nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction in reserve; and/or if Israel's leaders believed that non-nuclear retaliations would not prevent national annihilation. As indicated previously, Project Daniel determined that the threshold of existential harms must be far lower than wholesale physical devastation.

Faced with imminent and existential attacks, Israel, taking a cue from *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, dated 20

September 2002, could preempt enemy aggression with conventional forces. American strategy of preemptive attack affirms the growing reasonableness of anticipatory self-defense under international law. If Israel were to draw upon such expressions of US policy, 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 undertake a quantum escalatory initiative.

If the enemy state's response to 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, 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—Israeli nuclear counter-retaliation could not be ruled out. Such a counter-retaliation would likely not be exercised 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, but not entirely inconceivable, that Israel would ever decide to preempt enemy state aggression with a nuclear defensive strike. While circumstances could surely arise where such a defensive strike would be rational and also acceptable under international law (such a policy has been embraced by the United States in Joint Publication 3-12, *Doctrine for Joint Nuclear Operations*, dated 15 March 2005), it is improbable that Israel would ever permit itself to reach such circumstances. An Israeli nuclear preemption could be expected only if: Israel's state enemies had unexpectedly acquired nuclear or other unconventional weapons presumed capable of destroying the Jewish State; these enemy states had made explicit that their intentions paralleled their capabilities; these states were authoritatively believed ready to begin a countdown-to-launch; and Israel believed that non-nuclear preemptions could not possibly achieve the minimum needed levels of damage-limitation, 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 would in all probability ensue. This would be true so long as: the enemy state's first-strikes would not destroy Israel's second-strike nuclear capability; the enemy state's retaliation for Israeli conventional preemption would not destroy Israel's nuclear counter-retaliatory capability; Israeli preemptive strikes involving nuclear weapons would not destroy enemy



second-strike nuclear capabilities; and Israeli retaliation for the enemy state's conventional first-strikes would not destroy the enemy's nuclear counter-retaliatory capability. From the standpoint of protecting its security and survival, Israel must now take proper steps to ensure its survival with respect to the scenarios outlined.

Both Israeli nuclear and non-nuclear preemptions of enemy unconventional aggressions might 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 be greatest when potential aggressors were permitted to deploy numbers of unconventional weapons without eliciting Israeli or American preemptions.

If such deployment were to take place, as now seems increasingly likely, Israel might effectively forfeit the non-nuclear preemption option. Its alternatives to nuclear preemption would no longer be a conventional preemption or simply waiting to be attacked. It is only natural to assume that the risks of an Israeli nuclear preemption, of nuclear exchanges with an enemy state, and of enemy nuclear first-strikes could all be dramatically reduced by timely Israeli or American non-nuclear preemptions. These preemptions would be directed at critical military targets and pertinent regimes. As outlined in the Project Daniel report, the latter option could include the dedicated elimination of enemy leadership and scientific elites.

### ***Israel's Policy of Nuclear Ambiguity***

We have suggested some of the ways in which a nuclear war might begin between Israel and its enemies. From the standpoint of preventing such a war, it is essential that Israel now protect itself with suitable policies of preemption, defense, and deterrence. This last set of policies, moreover, will depend substantially upon whether Israel continues to obscure its nuclear strategy, or whether it decides to change from a formal nuclear posture of "deliberate ambiguity" to one of selected disclosure.

In one respect, the issue is already somewhat moot after Prime Minister Olmert's statement. Indeed, it was already essentially moot more than ten years ago, when then Prime Minister Shimon Peres made a somewhat similar public observation. Shortly after coming to power as Prime Minister, Peres took the then unprecedented step of openly acknowledging Israel's nuclear capability. Responding to press questions about the Oslo Peace Process and the extent of Israeli concessions, he remarked that he would be delighted to "give up the atom" if the entire region would only embrace a comprehen-

sive security plan. Although this remark was certainly not an intended expression of changed nuclear policy, it did unwittingly raise the question of an Israeli shift away from nuclear ambiguity.

Nuclear disclosure is far more than a simple “yes” or “no.” The basic question was initially answered by Peres’ “offer” and subsequently by Olmert. What needs to be determined is the timing of purposeful disclosure and the extent to which Israel should communicate its nuclear capabilities and intentions to selected states. This issue was central to the deliberations undertaken by the Project Daniel panel, which concluded that Israel’s bomb should “remain in the basement” as long as possible, but it should be more or less revealed if enemy circumstances would change in an ominous fashion.

In essence, because the report stipulates the need for an expanded Israeli doctrine of preemption, the project’s statement on nuclear ambiguity advocates that Israel should “remove the bomb from its basement” if Israel should have failed in its attempt to exploit the recommended doctrine of preemption.

The rationale for Israeli nuclear disclosure does not lie in expressing the obvious; that Israel has the bomb. Instead, it lies in the informed understanding that nuclear weapons can serve the nation’s security in a number of ways, all of which may be of benefit depending on the extent to which certain aspects of these weapons and the associated strategies are disclosed. The pertinent form and extent of disclosure is vital to Israeli nuclear deterrence.

To protect itself against enemy strikes, particularly those carrying existential costs, Israel needs to exploit every component of its nuclear arsenal. The success of Israel’s efforts 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 known in advance by enemy states. Before an enemy is deterred from launching first-strikes against Israel or from launching retaliatory attacks following an Israeli preemption, it may not be enough to simply “know” that Israel has the bomb. Potential enemies need to recognize that Israeli nuclear weapons are sufficiently invulnerable to attack and they are aimed at high-value targets. In this context, the *Final Report of Project Daniel* recommends that “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 means that Israel’s second-strike response to enemy aggressions involving certain biological or nuclear weapons would be unambiguously directed at enemy populations, not at enemy weapons or infrastructures.

It may appear, at first 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 entirely likely that a nuclear-armed enemy could conceivably regard any Israeli retaliatory destruction of its armed forces as “acceptable” in certain circumstances. Such an enemy may even conclude that the expected benefits of annihilating “the Zionist entity” outweigh any expected retaliatory harms to its military. Under such circumstances, Israel’s nuclear deterrent would fail, possibly with existential consequences.

It is highly unlikely, however, that any enemy state would ever calculate that the expected benefits of annihilating Israel would outweigh the expected costs of its own annihilation. Excluding an irrational actor—a prospect that falls outside the logic of nuclear deterrence—enemies of Israel would assuredly refrain from nuclear or biological attacks that would presumptively elicit massive counter-value reprisals. This reasoning holds only to the extent that these enemies fully believe that Israel will make good on its announced strategy. Israel’s nuclear deterrent, once it were made explicit, would need to state to all prospective nuclear enemies: “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, certain levels of biological attack, or by combined nuclear and biological attack, we will not harm your cities.”

Some readers may be disturbed by this reasoning, discovering in it perhaps an ominous hint of “Dr. Strangelove.” Yet, the counter-value targeting strategy recommended by Project Daniel represents Israel’s best hope for avoiding nuclear or biological warfare. It is the most humane strategy available. The Israeli alternative, an expressed counterforce targeting doctrine, would produce a higher probability of nuclear or nuclear/biological war. Such a war, even if all weapons remained targeted on the enemy’s military forces and structures (an optimistic assumption) would almost certainly entail higher levels of collateral damage.

The very best weapons, Clausewitz wrote, are those that achieve their objectives without ever actually being used. This is certainly the case with nuclear weapons. Israel’s nuclear weapons can only succeed through their non-use. Project Daniel made clear in its *Final Report to Prime Minister Sharon* that nuclear war-fighting must always be avoided.

The Project Daniel Group recommends that Israel take whatever actions are necessary to prevent enemy nuclearization, up to and including certain acts of preemption. Should these measures fail (measures that are permissible under international law as expressions of “anticipatory self-defense”), the State of Israel should immediately end its posture of nuclear ambiguity with open declarations of counter-value targeting. In fact, Prime

Minister Olmert's commentary on Israel's nuclear capacity indicates that such declarations may not be far off.

### ***Israel's Survival Amidst Growing Anarchy***

In an 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, there are times when its commitment to peaceful settlement will not be reciprocated. Moreover, as noted earlier, there are times when the idea of an existential threat may reasonably apply to a particular level of harm that falls well below the threshold of complete national annihilation.

Examining pertinent possibilities, the Project Daniel study group noted three distinct but interrelated existential threats to Israel:

- Biological or Nuclear (BN) threats from states.
- BN threats from terror organizations.
- BN threats from combined efforts of states and terror organizations.

To the extent that certain Middle Eastern states are permitted to develop WMD capabilities, Israel may have to someday deal with an anonymous attack scenario. In such a scenario the enemy state would not identify itself, and Israeli post-attack identification might be exceedingly difficult. What is Israel to do in such a situation? The Group recommended to then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon 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 further recommended that massive reprisals be targeted at between ten and 20 large enemy cities (counter-value targeting) and that the nuclear yields of such Israeli reprisals be in the high range. Such deterrent threats would be very compelling to all rational enemies, but at the same time have little or no effect upon irrational ones. In the case of irrational adversaries, Israel's only hope for safety will likely lie in the appropriate and operationally feasible acts of preemption.

A policy of Mutual Assured Destruction that once existed between the United States and the Soviet Union would never work between Israel and its enemies. Rather, the Project Daniel Group recommended that Israel must prevent its enemies from acquiring BN weapons, and that any notion of BN "parity" between Israel and its enemies would be intolerable. Accordingly, The Group advised Prime Minister Sharon that "Israel immediately adopt—as highest priority—a policy of preemption with respect to enemy existential threats." Such a policy would be based upon a limited definition of "existen-

tial,” as described above, and would be designed to enhance Israel’s overall deterrent posture.

Recognizing the close partnership and overlapping interests between Israel and the United States, the Project Daniel Group strongly supports the ongoing American Global War on Terrorism. In this connection, the study group has 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 nations and groups developing weapons of mass destruction (a plausible expectation in the aftermath of the Baker-Hamilton Iraq Study Group report), Israel must reserve for itself the unhindered prerogative to undertake its own preemption options. Understood in the more formal language of international law, these operations would be an expression of “anticipatory self-defense.”

The Project Daniel Group began its initial deliberations with the following concern: Israel faces the hazard of a suicide-bomber in macrocosm. In this scenario, an enemy Arab state or Iran would act against Israel without ordinary regard for any retaliatory consequences. This is the same fashion as the individual suicide bomber who acts without fear of personal consequences, indeed, one who actually welcomes the most extreme personal consequence, death. An enemy would launch WMD attacks against Israel with full knowledge and expectation of overwhelming reprisals. The conclusion to be drawn from this scenario is that Israeli deterrence vis-à-vis “suicide states” would be immobilized by enemy irrationality and that the only recourse in such circumstances would have been preemption.

### ***Israel’s Preemption and Nuclear Warfighting Doctrine***

International law is not a suicide pact. It has long permitted states to initiate forceful defensive measures when the threat of “imminent danger” of aggression is present. This rule of “anticipatory self-defense” had been expanded and reinforced by the issuance of *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. Released on 20 September 2002, this document asserts, inter alia, that traditional concepts of deterrence will not work against an enemy “whose avowed tactics are wanton destruction and the targeting of innocents . . . .” As Israel is substantially more vulnerable than the United States, its particular right to resort to anticipatory self-defense under threat of identifiable existential harms is entirely beyond legal questioning.

Considering the US strategy on expansion of preemption, the Project Daniel Group suggested to Prime Minister Sharon that such policy could

pertain as well to certain nuclear or biological threats against Israel. The group suggested that this policy be codified as doctrine, and that such responsive actions be conventional in nature. Preemption may be overt or covert, and range from “decapitation” to full-scale military operations. Further, the study group advised that decapitation may apply to both leadership elites (state and non-state) and various technical experts essential to the fashioning of enemy WMD arsenals. The Group reminded the Prime Minister that any forcible “prevention” of enemy nuclear or biological deployments would be profoundly distinct from the “preemption” of an existing enemy nuclear or biological force. Attempts at preemption against an enemy that had already obtained a nuclear or biological capacity might 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 might be wrongly interpreted as a nuclear first-strike. If unsuccessful, nuclear preemptive strikes could elicit the enemy’s “counter-value” second strike; a deadly attack upon Israeli civilian populations.

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

The Project Daniel Group advised Prime Minister Sharon 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 targeted (counter-value) warhead designed at a level sufficient to destroy the aggressor’s principal population centers and fully compromise national viability. The study group suggested that Israel make every effort to avoid using nuclear weapons in support of conventional operations. These weapons may create a seamless web from the conventional to the nuclear battlefield, something Israel should scrupulously avoid.

The Group considers it useful for Israel to plan for selective regime-targeting in certain residual instances. With direct threats targeted against individual enemy leaders, costs to Israel would be much lower than with alternative forms of warfare. Threats of regime targeting are often more per-

suasive than threats against the enemy's weapons or infrastructures. However, such a strategy is based on the premise that the prospective targets are first made to feel sufficiently at risk.

The Project Daniel Group provided a final set of suggestions related to the lawful remedy of anticipatory self-defense. Israel should be empowered with a "Long Arm" to meet its preemption objectives. This translates to the acquisition of long-range fighter aircraft with the capability to penetrate deep, heavily defended areas, and to survive. It also means air-refueling tankers, communications satellites, long-range unmanned aerial vehicles, survivable precision weapons with high lethality, and refined electronic warfare and stealth capacities. As of December 2006, it appears that much of our specific advice related to such matters, especially air-refueling capabilities, has been heeded.

### ***Israel's Deterrence and Defense Doctrine***

The Project Daniel Group strongly recommended that the Prime Minister accept a broad strategy of defensive first-strikes, but we also advised against his using Israel's undisclosed nuclear arsenal for anything but essential deterrence. This means that enemy states must recognize the fact that certain forms of aggression against Israel will elicit massive Israeli nuclear reprisals against city targets. At the present time we suggest that such an understanding can be communicated by Israel without more explicit nuclear disclosure, but the group also recognizes that the adequacy of nuclear ambiguity would change immediately if enemy nuclearization should become a reality.

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. But even if this should require purposeful disclosure of nuclear assets and doctrine, such revelations would have to be limited to that required to convince Israel's enemies of its capacity and resolve. This would mean revealing only those aspects needed to identify the survivability and penetration-capability of Israel's nuclear forces and its political will to launch massive retaliation.

The Project Daniel Group advised Prime Minister Sharon that Israel should always do whatever it can to ensure a secure and recognizable second-strike nuclear capability. Once nuclear ambiguity is ended, nuclear disclosure will play a crucial communications role. The essence of deterrence lies in communicating the nation's capacity and will to those who would do Israel harm. Admittedly, the retaliatory use of nuclear weapons by

Israel would signify failure of its deterrent. Recalling the thoughts of the ancient Chinese military thinker Sun-Tzu, the very highest form of military success is achieved when one's strategic objectives can be met without any actual use of force.

To meet its primary deterrence objective—deterrence of enemy first-strikes—Israel must seek and achieve a visible second-strike capability with the ability to target approximately 15 enemy cities. Ranges should encompass cities in Libya and Iran, with nuclear bomb yields at levels sufficient to fully compromise the aggressor's viability as a functioning state. By utilizing counter-value-targeted warheads for maximum destruction, Israel could achieve the optimal deterrent effect, thereby neutralizing the overall asymmetry between any enemy state and the State of Israel. Enemy targets would be selected with the understanding that their destruction would promptly force the aggressor to cease all nuclear, biological, and/or chemical exchanges.

The Group was secure in its understanding that all of its recommendations to the Prime Minister related to Israeli nuclear deterrence were fully consistent with authoritative international law. On 8 July 1996, the International Court of Justice at The Hague (not known for pro-Israel sympathies) 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 Project Daniel Group advised Prime Minister Sharon that Israel must display flexibility in its nuclear deterrence posture in order to respond to an enemy's expansion of nuclear weapons. It may be necessary under certain circumstances for Israel to deploy a full "triad" of strategic nuclear forces. For now, however, we recommended that Israel continue to manage without nuclear missile-bearing submarines. This recommendation would hold true only as long as the probability of an enemy or combination of enemies destroying Israel's land-based and airborne-launched nuclear missiles in a first-strike attack remains low.

Israel's nuclear deterrent should be reinforced by far-reaching active defenses. The Group emphasized that Israel should take immediate steps to operationalize an efficient, multi-layered antiballistic missile sys-



tem capable of intercepting and destroying a finite number of enemy warheads. This missile defense system would require a high probability of success with a reliable capacity for distinguishing between incoming warheads and decoys.

In particular, Israel's "Arrow Missile Defense System" is being developed to fill this strategic need. The Israel Air Force (IAF), which operates the Arrow, is committed to meeting its goal of deploying interceptors on schedule. Such a capability would reinforce Israel's qualitative edge over its adversaries. Israeli engineers are making every effort to ensure that the Arrow will integrate effectively with the American "Patriot Missile System." The Project Daniel Group advised the IAF to continue energetically working on all interoperability issues related to missile defense.

In its effort to create a multi-layered defense system, Israel is rumored to be working on an unmanned aircraft capable of hunting-down and killing enemy mobile-ballistic missile launchers. Israeli military officials have tried to interest the United States in joining the launcher-attack project, known formally as "boost-phase launcher intercept" (BPLI). The Project Daniel Group advised Prime Minister Sharon that Israel should undertake BPLI with or without US support, recognizing, however, that gaining such support would permit the project to move forward more expeditiously and with greater cost-effectiveness.

Project Daniel underscored the criticality of multi-layered active defenses for Israel, but affirmed certain that Israel must always prepare to act preemptively before any destabilizing deployment of enemy nuclear and/or certain biological weapons.

### ***Conclusions***

Reflecting on Project Daniel's efforts, the group has been able to evaluate the broad range of recommendations contained in *Israel's Strategic Future*. These recommendations concern, inter alia:

- The manifest 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 Global War on Terrorism and in future inter-state conflicts in the Middle East.
- Deployment of suitable active defense systems.
- Avoidance of nuclear war-fighting wherever possible.

- Various ways to improve Israel's nuclear deterrence.
- Vital differences between rational and non-rational adversaries.
- Changing definitions of existential harms.
- Legal elements of "anticipatory self-defense."
- Possibilities for the peaceful settlement of disputes in the region.
- Budgetary constraints and opportunities.
- The maintenance of Israel's qualitative edge.
- Preparations for "regime targeting."
- Implications for Israel related to the growing anarchy in world affairs.

*Israel's Strategic Future* should be understood as a work in progress. The geo-strategic context within which Israel must fashion its future is continually evolving, and so, accordingly, must its strategic doctrine. Ultimately, such doctrine will serve as the foundation underpinning the Jewish State's policies and strategies.

Since the presentation of our original document to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon on 16 January 2003 there have been a few minor "victories" in the effort to control WMD proliferation among Israel's enemies. A case in point is Libya. At the same time, the circumstances in North Korea (which has manifest ties to some of Israel's regional enemies), Iran, and Pakistan remain highly volatile and dangerous. There is also evidence of expanding WMD ambitions in Egypt and Syria. With regard to terrorist groups (several are sustained by Arab and Islamic states), new alignments are being fashioned between various Palestinian organizations and al Qaeda. The precise configurations of these alignments are complex and multifaceted, but the net effect for Israel is unmistakably serious.

*Israel's Strategic Future* is 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. Both Israel and the United States are unambiguously in the cross-hairs of a worldwide Islamic "jihad" that is fundamentally cultural and theological in nature, and that will not concede an inch to the conventional norms of "coexistence" or "peaceful settlement." This threat to "unbelievers" is less than comforting to Jerusalem and Washington; however, it is a threat that must be acknowledged and dealt with intelligently.

The ongoing war in Iraq has demonstrated the evident weaknesses of national intelligence agencies to provide critical warnings in an effort to enhance strategic stability. Israel is not without a history of intelligence failure (lately, Israeli problems in the 2006 Lebanon War). Israel's strategic future will require an enhanced intelligence infrastructure and highly-refined "backup systems." Facing growing isolation in the world community—a

community willing to disregard Arab and Islamic acts of terrorism—Israel finds itself often in the unenviable position of having to fend for itself more than ever before. In the end, Israel’s survival will depend upon strategies, plans, and policies of its own making. These initiatives will themselves require a broader and more creative pattern of strategic thought if they are to be successful.

We learn from Ecclesiastes (34:1) that “Vain hopes delude the senseless, and dreams give wings to a fool’s fancy.” Israel’s strategic future is fraught with existential risk and danger; it is essential, therefore, that friends of Israel now approach this future with utter realism and candor. A nuclear war against the Jewish State would likely be undertaken as a distinct form of genocide, and there can be no greater obligation for Israel than to ensure protection against such crimes. It is with the sober understanding that Holocaust can take new forms at the beginning of the twenty-first century that Project Daniel completed its critical work.

### ***The Project Daniel Group***

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