

nian standoff, the nature of the conflict remains largely misunderstood. Ahmadinejad's questioning of the Holocaust, and Israel's demonization of Iran as a modern-day Nazi Germany, reflect a fundamental clash of ideologies, most Americans believe. On one side there's Israel, portrayed by its defenders as a democracy in a region beset by authoritarianism and an eastern outpost of Enlightenment rationalism. On the other side there's the Islamic Republic of Iran, depicted by its enemies as a hidebound clerical regime whose rejection of the West and whose aspiration to speak for all Muslims everywhere are symbolized by its refusal to grant Israel a right to exist. These ideologues have rejoined a battle in which there can be no parley or negotiated truce—only the victory of one vision and one value system over the other. Or so it would seem. Blinded by the condemnatory rhetoric, most observers have failed to notice a critical common interest shared by these two non-Arab powerhouses in the Middle East: the need to portray their fundamentally strategic conflict as an ideological clash.

After the end of the Cold War and the defeat of Iraq in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, the strategic considerations that had put Iran and Israel on the same geopolitical side in the latter part of the twentieth century evaporated. Soon enough, absent any common foes, Israel and Iran found themselves in a rivalry to redefine the regional order after the decimation of Iraq's military. Fearing that Israel's strategic weight would suffer if Iran emerged as the undisputed power in the Middle East, Israeli politicians began painting the regime in Tehran as fanatical and irrational. Clearly, they maintained, finding an accommodation with such "mad mullahs" was a nonstarter. Instead, they called on the United States to classify Iran, along with Saddam Hussein's Iraq as a rogue state that needed to be "contained." Israel's change of heart on Iran was initially met with skepticism in Washington, though the Israelis advanced the same argument they do today, namely that Iran's nuclear program would soon afford the black-turbaned clerics access to the bomb. "Why the Israelis waited until fairly recently to sound a strong alarm about Iran is a perplexity," Clyde Haberman of the *New York Times* wrote in November 1992. Haberman went on to note: "For years, Israel remained willing to do business with Iran, even though the mullahs in Teheran were screaming for an end to the Zionist entity."²

But for Israel, rallying Western states to its side was best achieved by bringing attention to the alleged suicidal tendencies of the clergy and to Iran's apparent infatuation with the idea of destroying Israel. If the Iranian leadership was viewed as irrational, conventional tactics such as deterrence would be impossible, leaving the international community with no option

but to have zero tolerance for Iranian military capabilities. How could a country like Iran be trusted with missile technology, the argument went, if its leadership was immune to dissuasion by the larger and more numerous missiles of the West? The Israeli strategy was to convince the world—particularly Washington—that the Israeli-Iranian conflict wasn't one between two rivals for military preeminence in a fundamentally disordered region that lacked a clear pecking order. Rather, Israel framed the clash as one between the sole democracy in the Middle East and a totalitarian theocracy that hated everything the West stood for. In casting the situation in those terms, Israel argued that the allegiance of Western states to Israel was no longer a matter of choice or mere political interest, but rather of survival, or at the very least of a struggle of good against evil.

Eventually the "mad mullah" argument stuck. After all, the Iranians themselves were the greatest help in selling that argument to Washington, because they too preferred an ideological framing of the conflict. When revolution swept Iran in 1979, the new Islamic leadership forsook the Persian nationalist identity of the regime of the overthrown Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, but not its yen for Iranian great-power status. Whereas the Shah sought suzerainty in the Persian Gulf and parts of the Indian Ocean regions, while hoping to make Iran the Japan of western Asia, the Khomeini government sought leadership in the entire Islamic world. The Shah's means for achieving his goal were a strong army and strategic ties to the United States. The Ayatollah, on the other hand, relied on his brand of political Islam and ideological zeal to overcome the Arab-Persian divide and to undermine the Arab governments that opposed Iran's ambitions. But whenever Iran's ideological and strategic goals were at odds, Tehran's strategic imperatives prevailed. So in the 1980s, when Iran was involved in a bloody war with Saddam Hussein's Iraq, the Iranians were careful not to follow up its diatribes against Israel with any concrete actions. Though ideology played a critical role in the revolution's early years, Iran's policy on Israel was to bark a lot, but never bite. The revolutionary regime's ideology and lurid rhetoric successfully veiled a fairly consistent pursuit of realpolitik.

After the Cold War, this double policy became all the more important because Israel was transformed from a partner that Iran needed to keep at arm's length to an aggressive competitor that had penetrated Iran's growing sphere of influence. But it was not possible to rally the Arab-Muslim masses to Iran's side for the sake of Iran's power ambitions. So Iran turned to ideology once more to conceal its true motives, while utilizing the plight of the Palestinian people to undermine the Arab governments that supported the

Oslo process of the 1990s. Iranian speechwriters took the lead in inveighing against Israel's "never-ending appetite for Arab lands," its oppression of the Palestinians, its disregard for UN Security Council resolutions, and the "insult to Islam" embodied in its continued occupation of Jerusalem, site of the Haram al-Sharif, or dome of the rock, the third-holiest site in Islam. To this day, the rhetoric of Tehran preaches that its struggle against Israel is not about geopolitical gains or even about Iran itself, but rather about justice for the Palestinians and honor for Islam. With the Israeli-Palestinian conflict cast in these terms, and fearing a backlash from their own populations, pro-Western Arab rulers have to tread carefully not to belittle the announced goals of Tehran. In the eyes of many Arab states, the power of Iran's rhetoric has made public opposition to Iran equivalent to acquiescence in or even approval of the Israeli and U.S. stance on the Palestinian issue. Indeed, anti-Iranian statements such as Jordanian King Abdallah's warning in late 2004 of a "Shiite crescent" stretching from Iran through post-Saddam Iraq into Lebanon, and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's denunciation in early 2006 of Iraqi Shias as Iranian loyalists, have been poorly received by the Arab public. Tehran's pro-Palestinian reputation is one reason why.

The ideological pronouncements emanating from Ahmadinejad and other Iranian figures are an effect, rather than a cause, of Iran's strategic orientation. Likewise, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's description of Iran as a "dark and gathering storm casting its shadow over the world" in his May 24, 2006, speech to Congress shouldn't be taken at face value. For now, both Iran and Israel seem to calculate—or miscalculate—that portraying their struggle in ideological and apocalyptic terms will provide each with a critical edge against the other in their efforts to define the order of the Middle East to their own benefit. But the dangers of this risky game are reaching intolerable levels and are dragging other actors into it. Israel has threatened to bomb Iran. The Bush administration has made similar threats, insisting that its own military option in relation to Iran remains on the table. Washington has even considered using nuclear weapons against Iran, according to press reports.³ And Tehran continues to call Israel a fabricated entity with no legitimacy and no future in the Middle East. Forgotten behind the threats, the slogans, and the sound bites are not only a political and strategic reality but also a human reality and millennia of Iranian-Jewish friendship.

There are few Western cities where Persian pop music blasts at full volume in shopping malls. Yet this is a daily, natural occurrence at Jerusalem's high-

security downtown bus terminal. Here, in the equivalent of New York's Penn Station, eighteen-year-old Israeli soldiers wait for their rides home, assault rifles slung over their shoulders, Persian pop legends Moin and Ebi pounding in their ears. Most of the CD stores here are owned by Iranian Jews, and over the past twenty years they have created a market for Persian pop in the very heart of the Jewish State. When one scratches the surface of the ferocious Israeli-Iranian enmity, an affinity between the two cultures emerges. In many ways they are more alike than different. Both tend to view themselves as somewhat superior to their Arab neighbors. Many Iranians think of the Arabs to their west and south as culturally inferior; as brutes who had the good fortune to have Persians as neighbors who could civilize and refine them. Similarly, having defeated the Arabs in numerous wars, most Israelis have little respect for their capabilities. "We know what the Arabs can do, and it isn't much," an Israeli analyst told me arrogantly, months before the war with Hezbollah in 2006 might have sobered him a bit. Incapable of suppressing their sense of superiority or of convincing the Arabs to let go of their own stereotypes of Persians and Jews, Israelis feel they are left with no option but to view true peace as unattainable. Some Israelis have all but given up the dream of living at peace with their neighbors, whether through true friendship or minimal but mutual recognition and acceptance, and have settled for a vision of "no war, no peace" built on a bedrock of Israeli military preponderance. The Iranians drew a similar conclusion centuries ago. "The Arabs are out to get us," Israelis and Iranians often think as they go about their daily lives.

Perhaps most importantly, both view themselves as culturally and politically disconnected from the region where they are forced to face their regional foes through the lens of a Manichean mindset. Ethnically, the Jews of Israel are surrounded by a sea of Arabs who may not always have been at war with Israel, but who have never been at peace with Israel. Culturally, Ashkenazi Jews from Eastern Europe dominate Israeli society, even though the profile of Mizrahi, or Oriental, Jews has risen in recent years. And religiously, of course, Israel is unique regionally and globally as the only state based on the Jewish faith. In perhaps a natural response to the long Jewish history of persecution, Israel has a penchant for mistrusting the outside world. According to this mindset, international institutions and global alliances can never substitute for Israel's own ability to protect itself. At the end of the day, a UN Security Council resolution can never protect Israel as well as two hundred nuclear warheads, Israelis believe. "These are weapons of peace," an Israeli general told me proudly, failing to see the contradiction in terms.

The Iranians aren't terribly different. Proud heirs to a civilization that precedes Islam by at least two millennia, they are the first to point out to Westerners that they are not Arabs. Iran, or the Land of the Aryans, as it is believed to mean, is largely populated by peoples speaking Indo-European tongues. Persian (or Farsi) is linguistically closer to French and Swedish than it is to Arabic, although it includes many Arabic words and is written in the Arabic script. And though Iran was Islamized in the seventh century A.D., the Persians kept their language, cultural traditions, and the special quality that to this day connects them to their Zoroastrian past. The Iranian New Year, Nowruz (New Day), has been celebrated in Iran for more than three thousand years and remains the largest Iranian holiday today, far outshining any Islamic festival. When Ashura, the Shia Muslim day of mourning commemorating the martyrdom of Hussain ibn Ali, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad, at the Battle of Karbala in the year A.D. 680, coincides with Nowruz, a day of rejoicing, the Zoroastrian soul of Iran wins in spite of the wishes of Iran's clerical rulers.

Even as Muslims, the Iranians distinguish themselves from their surroundings by following the Shia line of Islam rather than the much larger and dominating Sunni camp. And like Israelis, Iranians are deeply suspicious of the outside world. While Jews have been persecuted and have survived a Holocaust, Iranians have fought colonization, annexation, decades of foreign intervention, and, last but not least, an eight-year war with Saddam Hussein's Iraq, in which virtually the entire world—including the United States—sided with Iraq. When Saddam invaded Iran in 1980, the UN didn't consider it a threat to international peace and security; it took the Security Council more than two years to call for withdrawal of the invading forces. (Compare that to Saddam's 1990 assault on Kuwait, when a Security Council Resolution [UNSR 660] passed within twelve hours of the invasion, demanding an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Iraqi forces.) Another five years passed, mainly because of American procrastination, before the UN addressed Saddam's use of chemical weapons against Iranian soldiers and civilians. (The United States and Western European countries either directly sold components for chemical weapons to Saddam or knew and quietly approved of such sales.) Even then, Washington ensured that the UN resolutions would be watered down to protect Saddam. The United States later cited these same crimes to justify its invasion of Iraq in 2003. For the Iranians, the lesson was clear: When in danger, Iran can rely on neither the Geneva Conventions nor the UN Charter for protection. Just like Israel, Iran has concluded that it can rely only on itself.

Jews and Iranians are no strangers to each other. Their cultures, religions, and histories are intimately intertwined and date back to biblical times. The origins of their relations can be traced to the eighth century B.C., when the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III forcibly resettled thousands of Jews in Media (northwestern Iran). Another group of Jews was resettled in Ecbatana (Hamadan) and Susa in 721 B.C. by his successor, Sargon II. To this day, Hamadan constitutes a major center for Iranian Jews. Hamadan is also reputed to be the burial site of Queen Esther, King Xerxes' wife, who saved the Jewish people from persecution in the fifth century B.C. This occasion is still celebrated by Jews in the Purim festival (Esther 3:1–9:32). Furthermore, the grave of the Old Testament prophet Daniel lies outside modern day Susa, in southwestern Iran.⁴ The most significant wave of Jewish settlers arrived after the Persian king Cyrus the Great sacked Babylon in 539 B.C. and liberated the Jews from Babylonian captivity. The Jews appreciated the Persian king so much that they elevated him to the status of a God-sent savior, the only non-Jew to achieve that standing in the Bible (Ezra 1:1–7). Even though the Persians allowed the Jews to return to Israel and paid for the reconstruction of the temple in Jerusalem, many chose to immigrate to Persia. The twenty-five thousand Jews of modern-day Iran are direct descendents of those who chose to settle in what was then the world's sole superpower.

What is perhaps more important, and arguably explains why Persian Jews have been such an integral part of Iran throughout history, is that, unlike other Diasporas, Iranian Jews didn't flee to Iran. They moved there voluntarily, and, ever since, through good times and bad, Iran has been their home. Even today, under the Islamic Republic, Iran hosts the largest Jewish community in the Middle East outside of Israel, even though tens of thousands have left for Israel or the United States.⁵ The books of Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel give favorable descriptions of the relationship of the Jews to the court of the Persians. Like other subjects in the Persian Empire, the Jews enjoyed religious freedom and followed their own legal code in personal matters such as marriage and family law. This mild treatment made the Jews less resistant to Persian influences on the Jewish faith. The Persian Zoroastrians shaped many of the key tenets of modern Judaism. From the Persians the Jews obtained the concepts of linear time, eschatology, angelology, and demonology, as well as concepts such as heaven and hell, which later influenced Christianity and Islam.⁶ Most importantly, however, it was under Persian influence that Judaism became a monotheistic religion. The Zoroastrians were the first to believe in one universal god, Ahura Mazda, and contact with the Persians helped the Jews transcend their

own tribal, henotheistic conception of god (the idea that each people have their own singular god). This is vividly seen in the literary works dating from the time of the Achaemenian empire, when the Jews began to describe a single god as opposed to pronouncing their god as the greatest among many other gods—which was the conception embraced by earlier Jewish prophets and figures.⁷

Some two hundred thousand Iranian Jews and their descendants live in Israel. Some of them belong to the highest levels of the Israeli political elite. In the Islamic Republic, these individuals would never have been able to excel in their careers. Long before reaching prominence, they would have been stopped by the glass ceiling that separates religious minorities, seculars, and disbelievers from those considered to be capable of being loyal to the Islamic Republic. Current Israeli President Moshe Katsav and Deputy Prime Minister (and former Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces [IDF] and Defense Minister) Shaul Mofaz were both born in Iran. The recently resigned IDF chief of staff, Dan Halutz, was born to Persian immigrants.

When Katsav worked at the UN, a favorite pastime of his was to embarrass Iranian diplomats at various events by seeking to converse with them in Persian. Forbidden to talk to Israeli officials (at least in public), the Iranian diplomats could rid themselves of the unrelenting Katsav only by leaving the events. Katsav found that profoundly amusing. Mofaz and Halutz approach Iran with a bit less humor; they are some of the most hawkish Israeli leaders regarding Iran. When asked in a press conference in January 2005 how far Israel would go to stop Iran's nuclear program, Halutz, a former pilot, gave a chilling response: "Two thousand kilometers." That's the distance between Israel and Iran. For other Iranian Jews—both in Israel and in Iran—the tensions between the two countries have caused major pain and anxiety. Since the Iranian revolution there has been an unwritten understanding between Iran's Jewish minority and the Iranian authorities. As long as the Jews of Iran oppose Zionism and the Israeli state, they would be protected in Iran and given a great deal of religious freedom. "This arrangement, which makes a clear separation between being a Jew and being a Zionist, was the community's idea; they brought it to the Khomeini regime after the revolution," noted David Menashri, Israel's most prominent expert on Iran, himself an Iranian-born Jew.⁸ Khomeini issued a "fatwa," a religious decree, declaring that Jews were to be protected.⁹

Few Iranian Jews take Ahmadinejad's anti-Israel rhetoric seriously, and they point to the fact that little has changed for Iranian Jews under him. "Anti-Semitism is not an eastern phenomenon, it's not an Islamic or Iranian

phenomenon—anti-Semitism is a European phenomenon," Ciamak Mor-sathegh, head of the Jewish hospital in Tehran, explained.¹⁰ Iran's forty synagogues, many of them with Hebrew schools, haven't been touched. Neither has the Jewish library, which boasts twenty thousand titles; or Jewish hospitals and cemeteries. Still, Iran's Jews have not sat idly by. The Jewish member of the Iranian Majlis, or parliament (most religious minorities are guaranteed a seat in the parliament), Maurice Mohtamed, has been outspoken in his condemnation of Ahmadinejad's comments. "When our president spoke about the Holocaust, I considered it my duty as a Jew to speak about this issue," Mohtamed told the *Guardian*. "The biggest disaster in human history is based on tens of thousands of films and documents. I said these remarks are a big insult to the whole Jewish society in Iran and the whole world."¹¹ Haroun Yashayaei, the chairman of Iran's Jewish Council, quickly followed suit, sending Ahmadinejad a strongly worded letter protesting his remarks.¹² The Jewish community won support from Mohammad Khatami, Ahmadinejad's more moderate predecessor. "We should speak out if even a single Jew is killed," the reformist president said in widely published remarks in early 2006. "Don't forget that one of the crimes of Hitler, Nazism and German National Socialism was the massacre of innocent people, among them many Jews."¹³

Iranian Jews in Israel have faced similar dilemmas. Quite understandably, Ahmadinejad's questioning of the Holocaust and his call for Israel to be moved to Europe have sparked fears of a revival of fascism among Ashkenazi Jews. But Iranian Jews in Israel have been less alarmed, though equally angered. "European Jews do not know Ahmadinejad as well as Iranian Jews, so his pronouncements about the Holocaust are more effective with them," explained Soli Shavar, a Persian Jew who teaches at Haifa University. "[The Iranian Jews] know [where] the jargon and rhetoric of the radical element comes from."¹⁴ After all, many Iranian Jews in Israel see Iran up close—a perspective that other Israelis never experience. During Khatami's presidency, travel between the two countries via Turkey was made easier, and the direct telephone lines—which have never been cut—are used more frequently as prices plummet. Persian Jews travel from Israel to Turkey, where they mail back their Israeli passports and take out their Iranian passports as they hop on the next flight to Tehran. Some Jews who have lost their Iranian passports even go to the Iranian consulate in Istanbul and request new ones, fully disclosing their new Israeli nationality. Surprisingly, the Iranian authorities don't seem to mind.

With all their cultural similarities, there is also much that separates the

two. The differences between Iranians and Israelis are something the Persian Jews deal with daily. Culturally and economically, some Iranian Jews prefer their Persian birthplace to their Jewish homeland. Many of the recent Iranian immigrants to Israel came for economic and not political reasons. Thinking that Israel was an economic paradise, they left their lives in Iran to make better ones in Israel. But to many, Israel has not lived up to their expectations, and now they dream of returning to Iran. Some have acted on those dreams. According to Orly Halpern of the *Jerusalem Post*, Jerusalem's Jaffa Road and Rehov Ben-Yehuda are lined with Iranian shopkeepers who say they are desperate to go back—some to visit, some to live. "In Iran, everyone says that in the land of Israel, it's great. They give you a house, they give you money. Life is easy," an Iranian Jewish immigrant told Halpern. "We came here and we were in shock. There it's difficult, but not as difficult as here," she said, adding that her "heart aches for Iran."¹⁵ Other Iranian immigrants clearly prefer Israel, and some tensions exist between recent and more established immigrants from Iran. Older immigrants tend to be somewhat suspicious of the more recent arrivals, at times accusing them of favoring the Iranian government.

As similar as Israelis and Iranians are, recent Iranian immigrants to Israel experience difficulty in overcoming the cultural shock. The contrast between the traditional values of Iranian society and the liberal currents of Israeli society—defined by the norms and culture of its European immigrants rather than by its Middle Eastern geography—could not be greater. I once had a conversation with an elderly Iranian Jew whom I sat next to during the bus ride from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv. Ehsaq (Isaac), as he was called, spared no love for the clerics in Tehran, but he liked to reminisce about the country in which he had spent most of his life. After all, Israel was only the most recent chapter in his long life, and he had never really managed to make the Jewish State his home. He didn't quite fit in. In typical Iranian fashion, Ehsaq felt compelled to share the bread he had brought with him for the hour-long bus ride with his fellow Ashkenazi passengers, scaring the daylight out of the more reserved European Jews, who could not quite determine if Ehsaq's dark features made him an Oriental Jew (Mizrahi) or a local Arab. Embarrassed, Ehsaq returned to his seat. After a moment of silence, he burst out in Persian with a thick Isfahani accent, "Farhang nadaran" (They're uncultured). This criticism against Israel is commonly heard among Iranian Jews.

Like most Russian Jews who immigrated to Israel after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Iranian Jews still prefer their own language over Hebrew

and cling to their Iranian culture with great devotion. They celebrate the Nowruz with such fanfare that festivities in Los Angeles or Tehran would pale in comparison. "I am proud to be Jewish, I am proud to be an Israeli, but I have nothing in common with these people," Ehsaq complained to me. "I don't want my children to live like they do," he said dismissively of the liberal ways of the European Jews. Misunderstandings between the two groups are not uncommon. Iranians tend to speak circumspectly, avoiding spelling out their intentions or objectives at all cost. With great finesse and redundant politeness, they deliver their message behind layers and layers of nuance and deliberately misleading compliments. Israelis are the opposite. It's the clash between *taarof* and *chutzpah*.

Taarof is an Iranian social principle, a concept of insincere politeness. For instance, Iranians invite each other to dinner not necessarily because they mean it, but to show politeness. The expectation is that the invited party will respond with equal politeness—by turning the invitation down. The impolite thing to do would be to accept the invitation on its first offering. An invitation should be considered sincere only if it has been offered roughly three times, after which, of course, it would be immensely rude to decline it. Vagueness, symbolism, and endless nuance are inherent in the Iranian culture and language. "*Taarof* is a sign of respect, even if we don't mean it," Nasser Hadian of Tehran University explained, in a statement Americans and Israelis would find blatantly contradictory.¹⁶ For Iranians, however, there is no contradiction. They understand *taarof* and why insincere politeness is still a sign of utter respect.

The Israelis have a different cultural trait, *chutzpah*, meaning "audacity" or "gall." They tell a joke to explain the concept. A spoiled twelve-year-old boy argues with his parents, and in a moment of rage he kills them both. He is immediately caught and taken to jail to await trial. As he is brought into the courtroom he throws himself at the feet of the judge and cries out: "Have mercy with me! After all, I am just a poor orphan!" Unlike many Iranians, Israelis don't tend to hide what they mean to say. They can't help themselves but to be absolutely direct without a single redundant word or any effort to reflect the nuances that inevitably characterize all social situations—a trait that Iranians and Iranian Jews simply find crude and offensive. While an Iranian would go to great lengths to avoid using the word "no," many Israelis thrive on categorical imperatives. Getting a nuanced answer from an Israeli can be as tricky as getting a straight answer from an Iranian. In the clash between *taarof* and *chutzpah*, no one wins. Only confusion reigns.

As much as they can find each other rude and impolite, or insincere and disingenuous, Israelis and Iranians also hold an exaggerated and almost mythical view of each other. The respect and awe the two rivals have for each other cannot be mistaken. "Iranians are perceived as masters of deception, and I think their mythical stature arises not solely because Israelis know Iranians and appreciate their abilities, but because they are so unlike Arabs," an Israeli expert on Iran told me. "When we classify our enemies, Arabs are the hard heads who would operate along exactly the same guidelines forever and ever, because they're Arabs. They are narrow-minded. Unsophisticated. Iranians are something that is much harder to characterize for Israelis because they are so much like us."

Some Israelis point to the biblical story of Queen Esther as an indication of Iranian mastery of the art of manipulation. According to the legend, Esther was the daughter of a Jewish merchant living in the city of Susa during the reign of Xerxes (486–465 B.C.). Her beauty caught the eye of the Persian king, who made her his queen, unaware of her Jewish heritage. Once on the throne, Esther learned of a conspiracy in the kingdom to kill all the Jews, orchestrated not by the Persians but by another minority group, the Amalekites. Esther approached the king and invited him and the key conspirator, Haman, to attend a banquet she had prepared, at which she would reveal to the Persian emperor a petition. At the banquet, Xerxes curiously asked Esther about the request. "Now what is your petition? It will be given you," he said, according to the Bible. But rather than making her wish known, Esther promised to reveal it if the king and Haman would join her for dinner the following day as well. There again, the king asked about her request. Esther had waited patiently for the right moment and it had now arrived. "If it pleases your majesty, grant me my life—this is my petition," she said. "For I and my people have been sold for destruction and slaughter and annihilation." Bewildered, the king demanded to know who had requested the death of his queen. "Haman," Esther replied confidently, knowing that her plan and patience had paid off. Haman was hanged, and the Jews of Persia were saved.

"In the Bible, Esther acts completely Persian," explained Shmuel Bar of the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya and a veteran of the Israeli intelligence community. "She deceives, conceals her intentions, manipulates and convinces stronger parties to fight her battles."¹⁷ According to the Shalem Center in Jerusalem, Israelis today should learn from Esther's manipulative "Iranian" instincts and employ it in their diplomacy. But the infatuation with Esther may reveal more about the Israelis themselves than about the

Iranians. "We like to think of ourselves as master tricksters," an Israeli expert on Iran commented. "Consider this: When you define someone as your worst enemy, you say a lot about yourself." Ironically, in Europe, where the currents of anti-Semitism have been strong historically, the title "masters of deception" was given to the Jewish people—and not to the Iranians. Many Israelis are wary of the stereotypes they have of the Iranians, arguing they are exaggerated at best and misleading at worst. "These myths are created by the old Iran hands; let's call them the 'Lubranis' [a reference to Uri Lubrani, the Israeli envoy to Iran in the 1970s who remains active on Iran affairs at the Ministry of Defense]," explained Ehud Yaari, a veteran Israeli television journalist. "I don't buy the myth that the Iranians have seven thousand years of diplomacy under the turban of Rafsanjani." But even Yaari could not deny the esteem Israelis have for the Iranian nation. "I miss Iran. A lot," he told me while reminiscing about the "good old days" before the revolution, when intelligence cooperation between the two countries was extensive and Israeli tourists flocked to visit Iran—the only Middle Eastern country where Israelis were welcome at the time.¹⁸

Iranians, on the other hand, refuse to express open admiration for the abilities of the Israelis and try to hide their concerns and fears behind inflammable rhetoric and ideological façades. Iranians angrily dismiss any suggestion that Israel is a rival with Iran for a leadership position in the region. How can that be, they ask with unmasked irritation? With all the problems Iran has with the Arabs, Israel's problems are far worse, they insist. At least Iran has Islam in common with the Arabs, and Iran is a "real country"—not an artificial state built on occupied Arab land, as they usually argue. "Nobody will accept Israeli hegemony, even if there is a two-state solution," Mustafa Zahrani, head of the Iranian Foreign Ministry's think tank IPIS, told me in his office in northern Tehran in August 2004. "Israeli actions are illegitimate, and their population is very small. They cannot be the dominating power. Just accepting them to continue to exist is too much, let-alone being the hegemon," he said.¹⁹ But behind Zahrani's harsh words lies the Iranian fear of facing a rival in the region that may be small, that may be culturally foreign to the region, but that holds an ace up its sleeve that Iran covets—the support of the United States of America.

On July 12, 2006, war broke out between Israel and Hezbollah, a Lebanese guerrilla and political group supported by Iran. On that day, a Hezbollah unit crossed the Israeli-Lebanese border and kidnapped two Israeli soldiers and killed another three. Israel immediately launched a rescue mission that

not only failed, but also led to the death of five more Israeli soldiers. To Hezbollah, this was a medium-size border clash; the purpose of the raid was to acquire Israeli prisoners, which Hezbollah could use to win the release of Lebanese and Palestinian fighters held by the Israelis. To Israel, and to its neoconservative supporters in the Bush administration, this was an act of war—not only by Hezbollah, but by Iran as well.

Within hours, Israel handed Hezbollah a response it hadn't expected; massive air strikes against Hezbollah strongholds and missile launchpads, as well as against Lebanon's civilian infrastructure. It was shock and awe, Israeli style. The Israelis even bombed Lebanese oil storage tanks and tarmacs at Beirut's airport, making it impossible for airplanes to take off or land. That move stranded up to twenty-five thousand Lebanese-Americans in the midst of the fighting, but the Bush administration didn't seem to mind. On the contrary, prominent neoconservatives, who for years had urged the Bush administration to take on Iran, were ecstatic. William Kristol of the *Weekly Standard* urged the Pentagon to counter "this act of Iranian aggression with a military strike against Iranian nuclear facilities. Why wait?" Describing the fighting in ideological terms—"an Islamist-Israeli war"—Kristol warned against appearing weak and concluded, "This is our war, too."²⁰ Never mind that Hezbollah, though a close ally of Iran and of Syria as well, has repeatedly demonstrated that it can come to important political and military decisions on its own, without Iranian approval or tutelage. To the neoconservatives and Israel's supporters on the right in America, the war in Lebanon represented a crucial step in their plan to turn Iran into the next Iraq.²¹ Only a day after the war began, one of Washington's most aggressive Iran hawks, Michael Ledeen of the American Enterprise Institute, called for the United States to expand the fighting into a regional war: "The only way we are going to win this war is to bring down those regimes in Tehran and Damascus, and they are not going to fall as a result of fighting between their terrorist proxies in Gaza and Lebanon on the one hand, and Israel on the other. Only the United States can accomplish it."²²

That same day, another supporter of the Bush administration's Middle East policy, John Gibson, wrote an editorial for the Fox News Channel in which he argued that Iran (that is, Hezbollah) hadn't attacked Israel. It had actually attacked the United States. "It's really a war by Iran on us."²³ Though President Bush didn't follow the advice of his neoconservative brethren, Washington did everything it could to prolong the war and thus give Israel time to destroy as much of Hezbollah as possible. "A cessation of violence is crucial, but if that cessation of violence is hostage to Hezbollah's

next decision to launch missiles into Israel or Hamas's next decision to abduct an Israeli citizen, then we will have gotten nowhere," Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told Fox News. President Bush himself responded to calls for an immediate cease-fire from the international community by urging them not to neglect the strategic opportunity the war provided. "What we're saying is, let's not lose sight of the broader context," Bush said on CNN.²⁴ Clearly, Bush's hope was that Israel's anticipated decapitation of Hezbollah would weaken Iran's spreading influence in the region and put an end to its challenge to America and Israel's regional dominance. Neutralizing Hezbollah would also deprive Iran of its deterrence and retaliatory capabilities, paving the way for a war with Tehran in which it wouldn't be able to strike back at the Jewish State. "War with Iran is inevitable," Ephraim Sneh, Israel's deputy defense minister, told me at a conference in southern Europe on July 28, 2006, halfway through the war. "Lebanon is just a prelude to the greater war with Iran," he said with frightening certainty.

After a war that left more than fifteen hundred people dead, mostly Lebanese civilians, displacing nine hundred thousand Lebanese and three hundred thousand Israelis, severely damaging Lebanon's infrastructure, and disrupting normal life across all of Lebanon and northern Israel, Sneh's prediction stands as an ominous warning. But if it comes to pass, the conflict won't be limited to Israel and Iran. It will be a regional war, pulling in other countries and nonstate actors alike. And it will be America's war, too, just as the neoconservatives have so desperately wished. (Unlike Iraq, Iran can inflict devastating harm on the United States due to its asymmetric military capabilities spread throughout the region.)

Today America stands at a dangerous crossroads, with the Iraq occupation rapidly collapsing in civil war and chaos, even as the U.S. military has been stretched to its limit. There is a great deal of confusion as to how America got mixed up in an Israeli-Iranian rivalry that is about neither ideology nor religion. Before it can find a path toward a peaceful future, Washington must first relearn the past and deal directly with the eight-hundred-pound gorilla.

an alliance of necessity: the secret friendship of the shah

The Arabs could tolerate the substance of close Iran-Israel relations as long as this was not apparent from surface indications.

—De-classified Memorandum of Conversation, U.S. embassy in Tehran, Iran, October 14, 1972

After the First World War, the British controlled Palestine in quasi-colonial fashion, in a mandate sanctioned by the League of Nations. The Zionist movement, which had begun at the end of the previous century and encouraged Jewish immigration to Palestine with the eventual goal of creating a Jewish State, flourished under the mandate. The growing Jewish population clashed repeatedly with the Arab majority, which was unalterably opposed to a Jewish State and which itself wanted independence from Britain. At various periods during the mandate, the British suppressed both Arab and Jewish guerrilla rebellions. Exhausted after the Second World War, financially broke, and torn between bitterly opposing demands from the Arab and Jewish populations, the British finally threw in the towel and asked the UN to settle the problem. On May 15, 1947, the United Nations created a Special Committee on Palestine, UNSCOP, to recommend a resolution. Iran was selected to be part of the eleven-state committee.

After several months of laborious hearings a plan was presented with the support of only eight of the committee's eleven members. The majority favored a partition of Palestine and the creation of independent Arab and Jewish States, with Jerusalem to be placed under international administration. Iran, together with India and Yugoslavia, opposed this idea and pre-

dicted that partition would lead to more rather than less violence.¹ At the time, Iran was ruled by Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the second emperor in the Pahlavi dynasty. His father, Reza Shah, had staged a coup d'état in February 1921 and ousted the ruling Qajar dynasty. Twenty years later, Reza Shah was deposed by the British and the Russians, who put his young son, Mohammad Reza, on the throne. Even before the creation of the Jewish State, Mohammad Reza Shah had predicted that partition of Palestine would lead to decades, if not centuries, of violence. Only through the creation of a single federal state containing both Jewish and Arab constituent states could peace be established, the Pahlavi regime maintained. Against Tehran's quiet objections, the partition plan was adopted by the General Assembly as Resolution 181 on November 29, 1947. Fighting immediately broke out between Jews and Palestinians, and less than six months later David Ben-Gurion declared the independence of the State of Israel. Iran, which together with twelve other nations voted against partition, chose not to formally recognize the new nation, a decision the Shah stuck to throughout his thirty-seven-year reign.²

At Israel's inception, Iran faced a dilemma that has characterized its dealings with the Jewish State ever since. The Shah knew that the creation of a non-Arab, pro-Western state in the Middle East could improve Iran's security by absorbing the attention and resources of the Arab states, which were Iran's traditional rivals in the region. But if the Shah were to officially recognize Israel or publicly support its creation, part of that Arab wrath would fall on Iran. Thus it behooved Iran to tread a path between overt hostility and overt alliance. For the next three decades, the Shah handled this balancing act with great astuteness.

CAUGHT IN THE SUPERPOWER GAME

The two clear winners of the Second World War were the United States and the Soviet Union. But their defeat of the Axis powers entangled them in a global rivalry, and soon after the war they began carving up the world into their respective spheres of influence. The Middle East was no exception; its abundance of oil made it a particularly valuable piece in the geopolitical chess game played by Washington and Moscow, which drew regional states into their respective camps. In return for their cooperation, those states were offered friendship and protection. For Iran, the choice was clear. Centuries of war between Iran and Russia had bred in the Shah a natural suspicion of Soviet intentions. The Communist ideology was a real threat to the Shah's rule in Iran, where the uneven distribution of wealth created fertile

ground for pro-Soviet groups such as the Iranian Tudeh ("People's") Party. The Shah hoped that joining the Western camp would entitle Iran to economic and military assistance from the United States in order to prevent Soviet adventurism in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf.

Israel's strategic options were more complex. The newly created Jewish State depended on the West for capital investment, but it was also in dire need of immigration from the Jewish communities in both the East and West to grow and survive. With the demographic balance tilted strongly against it—by 1948 there were approximately 1.35 million Arabs and 650,000 Jews in historic Palestine—Israel could not prosper without more Jewish immigrants. While Ben-Gurion always favored the United States as a primary patron, in the country's early days many Israelis felt an emotional and ideological affinity for the Soviet Union, because not only did strong socialist sentiment exist in Israel, but many Israelis identified the Soviet Union as the country primarily responsible for defeating Nazism. For the Shah, who saw the world primarily through the prism of the Cold War, Israel's ambiguous relations with the Soviet Union and its efforts to cultivate ties with both superpowers made it suspect. The Shah adopted a policy of "calculated ambivalence," maintaining a healthy distance from the Jewish State while waiting for it to clarify its allegiances. For the first two years of Israel's existence, Iran recognized it neither *de facto* nor *de jure*. But as Tel Aviv distanced itself from the Soviet camp, and as its pro-Western orientation solidified, Iranian suspicions were dispelled.³ In 1951, the Mossadeq government in Iran recognized Israel as a fact in the region but still refused *de jure* recognition, meaning that it did not officially establish relations with the Jewish State.⁴ Still, the *de facto* recognition had significant political implications—it essentially meant that Iran recognized the creation of the state of Israel and would not seek or support its undoing.

But choosing the Western camp did not resolve Israel's security dilemma. Israel was a lone state for Jews in a sea of hostile Arab states, some of which were developing closer ties to the Soviet Union. Since breaking the circle of Arab enmity appeared impossible, Israel put its faith in reaching out to the non-Arab states of the region, including Iran. This outlook gave birth to Ben-Gurion's doctrine of the periphery, a foreign policy concept that came to dominate Israeli strategic thinking till the end of the Cold War. The doctrine held that the improbability of achieving peace with the surrounding Arab states forced Israel to build alliances with the non-Arab states of the periphery—primarily Iran, Turkey, and Ethiopia—as well as with non-Arab minorities such as the Kurds and the Lebanese Christians.

This network of alliances would drive a wedge between Israel's enemies, weaken the Arab bloc, and halt the spread of pan-Arabism in the region, the reasoning went.⁵

Meanwhile, Iran's relationship with the Arab states was swiftly deteriorating.⁶ Though Iran sympathized with Arab nationalism and its quest for Arab independence from the European colonial powers (Iran was, after all, still emerging from its own painful history of British and Russian interference), the Shah felt increasingly uncomfortable with its pro-Soviet expressions.⁷ In Egypt, for example, the free officers' coup of 1952 ousted King Farouk and achieved final independence from Britain, slowly drifting into the Soviet orbit as a result. By no choice of their own, Iran and Israel soon found themselves facing a common security dilemma. Both feared Soviet designs on the region and the threat of radical pro-Soviet Arab states, and both saw the pan-Arab, anti-Western regime in Cairo, led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, as the main villain of the Middle East.⁸ Next to Israel, Iran's pro-Western emperor was one of Egypt's prime targets.⁹ Iran was particularly concerned about the territorial expansionism of pan-Arabism and Arab claims over Iran's southern oil-rich province of Khuzestan because this pushed Arab nations to ally against Iran even though their respective national interests may have dictated a different course.¹⁰ "The Iranians felt like [they were] surrounded by the Arabs. And the Arabs always adopted policies that were anti-Iranian," said Fereydoun Hoveyda, who served as Iran's ambassador to the UN during the 1970s while his brother, Amir Abbas Hoveyda, served as the Shah's prime minister.¹¹

By the late 1950s, an Israeli-Iranian entente had taken shape, fueled by the solidification of Egyptian-Soviet relations and the emergence of Nasser as the leader of the Arab masses after the 1956 Suez war. The collusion of Israel, Britain, and France in the attack on Egypt in 1956 cemented Nasser's and the wider Arab world's suspicion and hostility toward both their former colonial masters and Israel. But Ben-Gurion, ever so cautious and suspicious of the outside world's attitudes toward the Jewish State, feared that Iran and the periphery states wouldn't enter into full strategic relations with Israel unless pressured by the United States. On July 24, 1958, he sent a personal letter to U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower in which he warned about the spread of pan-Arabism and Communism in the Middle East, and requested U.S. support for Israel as a means of defending Western interests. He wrote that "with the purpose of erecting a high dam against the Nasserist-Soviet tidal wave, we have begun tightening our links with several states on the outside of the perimeter of the Middle East—Iran, Turkey and

Ethiopia. . . . Our goal is to organize a group of countries, not necessarily an official alliance, that will be able to stand strong against Soviet expansion by proxy through [Egyptian President] Nasser, and which might save Lebanon's freedom and, maybe in time, Syria's."¹² Eisenhower heeded Israel's call and offered America's backing to the periphery alliance.

Compatibility between Iran and Israel went beyond their two common threats. Israel's impressive economic growth and the Arabs' refusal to sell oil to Israel made Tel Aviv desperate for a commodity that Iran possessed in abundance.¹³ After the 1956 Suez crisis, Iran helped finance the construction of an eight-inch oil pipeline from Eilat in southern Israel through Beersheba to Israel's Mediterranean coastline. This pipeline, called the Eilat-Ashkelon pipeline, connected the gulf of Aqaba and the Mediterranean and enabled Iranian oil exports to bypass the strategically vulnerable Suez Canal. Lessening the dependence on the Egyptian-controlled Suez was of utmost importance to the Shah because 73 percent of Iran's imports and 76 percent of its oil exports passed through the canal. The deal, which took several days to conclude, was brokered in the suburbs of Tel Aviv in the summer of 1957 during a secret visit by a representative of the National Iranian Oil Company. The pipeline was laid in a record-breaking one hundred days and came into operation in late 1957, transporting Iranian oil to Israel at the price of \$1.30 per barrel. The pipeline was later upgraded to a sixteen-inch pipe after direct negotiations between Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol and the Shah in 1958. This was the first direct meeting between an Israeli cabinet minister and the Shah.¹⁴ Though neither Iran nor Israel acknowledged the oil trade or the pipeline cooperation, their relationship was an open secret and the subject of intense Arab criticism. Fearing that the Shah might abandon the project because of his Arab sensitivities, Washington granted the pipeline project its strong support only after receiving reassurances that Iran's financial interest in seeing to the completion of the pipelines outweighed Tehran's interest in appeasing Arab sentiments. Washington clearly sensed that the Shah wanted to keep Israel at a healthy distance and wanted assurances that pressure from the Arab states wouldn't prompt the Shah to renege on his commitments to the pipeline.¹⁵

And there were other reasons for the cultivation of stronger Israel-Iran relations: Iran had a sizable Jewish community, which Israel was eager to bring to the Jewish State, and Tehran was willing to provide Iraqi Jews with a safe passage to Israel as well. Iran, in turn, coveted Israel's influence in Washington and was in dire need of advanced Israeli technology for its own economic growth. Israel's expertise in irrigation was highly valued by the

technology-starved Iranians. The arid and uninviting climate and terrain of Iran and Israel opened up opportunities for extensive cooperation in the field of agriculture, even though political factors motivated this cooperation more than Iran's agricultural needs. The Shah often ordered his ministries to hire Israeli consultants as a means of cementing the relationship—even though their expertise wasn't always needed and their skill sets often were irrelevant to their assigned projects. "We had Israelis who weren't even agriculturalists who didn't collect salary, yet they were still involved in the projects," Iran's former deputy minister of agriculture explained.¹⁶ But hiring redundant Israeli consultants was a politically safe way for the Shah to balance his public distance from the Jewish State.¹⁷ Nonetheless, while there was a political aspect to the technological exchange, the Israelis did provide Iran with badly needed know-how and expertise. According to Arieh Eliav, former Israeli labor minister, Israel trained some ten thousand Iranian agricultural experts.¹⁸ Last but not least, Israel and Iran's common non-Arab makeup provided the two with an emotional dimension to their growing cooperation.¹⁹

AN UNBALANCED PARTNERSHIP

Clearly, as the most powerful country on Israel's periphery, Iran was a critical factor in Tel Aviv's political grand strategy. But Israel wasn't equally important to Iran despite Iran's need for Israeli technology. Throughout the 1950s, Iran viewed Israel primarily as a vehicle to prevent Soviet—and not Arab—advances in the region.²⁰ The Soviet Union constituted Iran's primary threat because it was eyeing the oil reserves of the region and using Nasser's Egypt as its surrogate to penetrate the Persian Gulf.²¹ "The Shah saw these Soviet twin pincers coming down through Afghanistan and Iraq," explained Charles Naas, who served as an American diplomat in Iran at the time.²² Clearly, Iranian fears of the Soviet Union benefited the United States because it made Iran all the more eager for the Western superpower's protection. Soviet support for the pan-Arab states, in turn, caused the Arab danger to Iran to be seen in Tehran as a mere extension of the Soviet threat, while the pan-Arab ideology was perceived more as a facilitator than as the root of this threat.

The Shah strongly believed that in the face of Soviet subversion or even a direct assault, no one could guarantee Iran's security but Iran itself.²³ This conviction was partly born out of a conversation between the Shah and an American ambassador in the late 1940s. At the time, the Shah was young, inexperienced, and impressionable. He had seen how Iran's weakness had

enabled the great powers to control the destiny of his country. This was an affront he was determined to change. "America would never go to war with the Soviets on account of Iran, to save Iran," the ambassador told the Iranian monarch matter-of-factly. The Shah never forgot that conversation.²⁴

The Soviets, on the other hand, did little to alleviate the Shah's fears. Moscow supported leftist Iranian opposition groups such as the Mujahedin-e Khalq, the Tudeh Party, and the Fedayeen-e Khalq in the hope that a Communist revolution would make Iran a Soviet satellite.²⁵ In a December 1974 interview with Beirut's *al-Hawadis* newspaper, the Shah emphasized that Iranian nervousness about pan-Arabism was rooted in Moscow's influence over the Arab governments that championed that ideology. With the Arabs, the Shah pointed out, Iran did not seek any enmity, even though the Palestinians supported Iranian opposition groups. What the Shah sought to avoid was a situation in which the activities of Palestinian and Arab nationalists would enable the Soviets to up the ante on Iran. "We have stood and we will stand at the side of the Palestinians, despite the fact that some of the groups of the resistance trained Iranian saboteurs to infiltrate our territory, kill our people, and blow up various installations," he said. "We know how to discriminate between the justness of the Palestinian question and the wrongdoing directed against us by some Palestinians. What I fear is that the Palestinians may allow international circumstances to make their cause a tool of Soviet or some other international strategy. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and the other Arab states would do well to help the Palestinians avoid such pitfalls."²⁶ With time, however, the Arab threat came to play a greater role in Iranian strategic thinking. As the Arab threat to Iran increased, so did Iran's military need for Israel and—paradoxically—its need to keep Israeli dealings secret:

A NOT-SO-SECRET MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE

Iran preferred to keep most of its collaboration with Israel out of the public eye. On the one hand, the Shah believed that overt relations with Israel would harm Iran's standing with the Arab nations and fuel Arab opposition to Iranian policies in the Persian Gulf. On the other hand, he needed Israel in order to balance the threat from the Soviets and pro-Soviet Arab states. To minimize the visibility of his Israeli dealings, the Shah decided to have interactions with Israel handled by Iran's dreaded secret police—Sazeman-e Ettela'at va Amniyat-e Keshvar (Organization of Information and State Security, or Savak).²⁷ In 1957, the Shah ordered the Iranian intelligence service to establish relations with the Israeli intelligence agency, the

Mossad, and manage Iran's sensitive dealings with the Jewish State, which often kept the Iranian Foreign Ministry in the dark. Iranian military and secret police operatives were secretly trained by Israeli intelligence officers in both Iran and Israel. Israel also trained four hundred Iranian pilots, paratroopers, and artillery men and sold Iran high-tech military equipment.²⁸ According to one former Iranian ambassador, the Mossad also trained the Savak in torture and investigative techniques as well.²⁹

Still, Tehran kept secret the visits of its officials to Israel. The Iranians traveled to Israel via Turkey and never had their passports stamped upon arrival in the Jewish State. This procedure ensured that the travel logs listed only a visit to Turkey and no trace of the Israel leg of the trip.³⁰ (To this day, Iranian Jews traveling to Israel follow the same route with the tacit approval of the Iranian government.) Even the deployment of Iranian diplomats in Israel was kept secret. During the 1970s, six Iranian diplomats manned the Iranian secret mission in Israel, but their records indicated that they were serving in Bern, Switzerland. The Iranian embassy in Israel was referred to as "Bern 2" in Iranian Foreign Ministry documents.³¹ The Iranians even tried to withhold the true location of their posting from American diplomats despite the United States's awareness of both the existence and the activities of the Iranian diplomats in Israel.³² Although Israel had grown accustomed to Iran's secretive approach, and though Israel was well aware of the Shah's precarious balancing act between living up to Iran's obligations as a Muslim nation and neutralizing the tide of Arab radicalism, Iran's contradictory policy and stance on Israel was never fully accepted in Tel Aviv. If Iran, a predominantly Muslim nation, were to openly recognize Israel, it would help advance Israel's quest to convince the Arabs that the Jewish State was a permanent feature of the Middle East. After all, Israel had proven its utility to the Shah and to Iran's national interest, yet the Iranian emperor refused to grant Israel full recognition.

Ben-Gurion's first visit to Iran in 1961 set the precedent on the secretive protocol.³³ The groundbreaking visit was kept secret, and successive trips of Israeli prime ministers to Iran simply followed the same protocol. A few years later, Israeli diplomats in Tehran urged Prime Minister Golda Meir to take a more aggressive line with the Shah on this matter and change the protocol. By bringing its relations with Iran into the open, Iran would have no choice but to recognize Israel de jure, decision-makers in Tel Aviv figured. The Israelis jumped on every opportunity to make their dealings with Iran public.³⁴ Meir's advisers proposed putting a sign on the building of the Israeli mission in Tehran to clearly identify it as such. She dismissed this pro-

posal but accepted the recommendation of the head of the Israeli mission, Meir Ezri, to convince Western powers such as the United States and the United Kingdom to pressure the Shah into publicly recognizing Israel. But the Shah wouldn't budge, and he further rebuked the Israelis by refusing for more than three years to meet with Israel's representative to Iran.³⁵

Throughout the 1970s, Iran succeeded with its diplomatic acrobatics of maintaining a geostrategic alliance with a state it did not officially recognize, and of permitting a large Israeli presence in Tehran without officially recognizing its mission as the embassy of the Jewish State. The Israeli flag wasn't flown at the mission and Israeli diplomats did not participate in ceremonies that protocol required other diplomats to attend. But in all matters except ceremony, the Israeli mission functioned like any other embassy. Despite the unofficial nature of the relationship, the head of the Israeli mission was commonly referred to as the Israeli ambassador to Iran, and by the 1970s he enjoyed ready access to the Shah. Israeli officials visited Iran frequently and met with the Shah one-on-one, often without the knowledge of the Iranian Foreign Ministry.³⁶ Although the symbolic value of winning the recognition of a major Muslim state in the Middle East was significant, Israel was careful not to push this issue too hard because it could negatively affect the substance of its relations with Tehran.³⁷ At the end of the day, it was an arrangement that, while not optimal, still worked to Israel's benefit. According to Amnon Ben Yohanan, a high-ranking Israeli diplomat serving in Tehran in the 1970s, the Israelis "were willing to forgo the ceremonial trappings of diplomacy as long as the real substance was present; while the Arabs could tolerate the substance of close Iran-Israel relations as long as this was not apparent from surface indications."³⁸ Iran, in turn, needed Israel militarily but had to keep its dealings with the Jewish State out of the public's eye to avoid attracting the attention of the pan-Arab governments.

THE GROWING IRANIAN-EGYPTIAN ENMITY

The Shah learned the hard way how public knowledge of his Israeli dealings undercut Iran's strategic interest. In July 1960, a foreign journalist asked whether Iran had decided to recognize Israel. Without further reflection, the Shah pointed to Iran's de facto recognition of Israel in 1951 by the Mossadeq government and said that "Iran has recognized Israel long ago."³⁹ The Shah's comments provoked a fiery response from Egypt's Nasser, who hastily cut diplomatic relations and embarked on a venomous propaganda campaign against Iran.⁴⁰ But Nasser wasn't concerned primarily about Iran's relationship with Israel. Rather, the Shah's unguarded statement pro-

vided the Egyptian leader with an opportunity to expand Egypt's influence in the Persian Gulf and to counter Iran's expanding relations with the Persian Gulf Arabs. Increasingly, the center of anti-Iranian Arab propaganda shifted from Baghdad—Iran's traditional Arab rival in the region—to Cairo.⁴¹ Egypt's aggressive posture and willingness to collaborate with Moscow were not taken lightly in Tehran. The Shah viewed the risk of a military engagement with Egypt, either directly or through Iraq, as substantial. "Iran was under direct threat of the military activities of the Egyptians in the Persian Gulf area," a former Iranian intelligence officer involved in the Iranian-Israeli collaboration explained. "[The Egyptians] were trying to build up naval forces that could be sent to the Persian Gulf in support of Iraq in direct military confrontation with Iran."⁴²

If Iran was weakened by Egypt and Iraq, the Arab side would be bolstered and the Iraqi army would be freed up to participate in a potential Arab attack on Israel. But as long as Iran balanced Iraq and diverted the Iraqi armed forces eastward and away from the Jewish State, Israel was provided with a small but important window of safety. So Israeli intelligence provided Iran—whose military was constantly preparing for potential Iraqi or Egyptian attacks—with extensive intelligence on Egyptian military movements and planning. Together with Turkey, the Iranian and Israeli intelligence services constantly monitored Soviet-Egyptian-Iraqi military cooperation. The three non-Arab countries observed Soviet military shipments destined for Egypt and Iraq as they made their way from the Black Sea to the Persian Gulf through the Suez Canal. But as the 1960s came to a close, the strategic context that had inspired the Israeli-Iranian entente in the early 1950s was slowly withering away.⁴³

rise of israel, rise of iran

Protect me!

—President Richard Nixon to the Shah,
selling the Twin Pillar policy, May 1972

The essence of the Iranian-Israeli entente of the 1950s and 1960s wasn't the inevitability of a non-Arab alliance against the Arab masses, but a congruence of interests formed by Iran's and Israel's common vulnerabilities. They shared interests because they shared common threats. The balance of power—and not the non-Arab makeup of the two countries—paved the way for the Iranian-Israeli entente. But the logic of the balance meant that the very basis of the alliance was threatened if either country overcame its differences with its neighbors or if one gained enough power to deal with the threats on its own. Because Arab-Israeli hostilities ran deeper than Arab-Persian grievances, Tel Aviv needed Tehran more than Tehran needed Tel Aviv. Iran was thus more likely to betray Israel than the other way around.

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw significant changes to the geopolitical map of the Middle East; Israel won a stunning victory against the Arabs in the 1967 war; the threat to Iran and Israel from Iraq increased; the superpowers' strategic relationship shifted from containment to détente; Egypt abandoned its alliance with the Soviet Union and shifted toward the Western camp after the 1973 Yom Kippur war; Iran experienced a rapid and unprecedented economic growth and hence regional influence; and the British decided to withdraw its fleet from the Persian Gulf, which enabled the Shah to play a dominant role in the affairs of the region and beyond. All

the new world order

Everything was going our way. All systems were go. And Iran was a problem for us, but so what? We had everything else.

—U.S. Ambassador Daniel Kurtzer, after Iraq's defeat in the Persian Gulf War and the collapse of the Soviet Union

Between 1990 and 1992, the Middle East underwent two shocks of unprecedented magnitude—the defeat of Iraq in the Persian Gulf War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. These geopolitical tsunamis significantly changed the way Iran and Israel viewed each other. The common threats that for decades had prompted the two states to cooperate and find common geostrategic interests—in spite of Iran's transformation into an Islamist anti-Zionist state—would no longer exist. While they both benefited from these events, the uncertainty of a new world order brought with it new dangers. As this new order in the Middle East was in the making, Tehran and Tel Aviv soon found each other on opposite sides, even though Iran's revolutionary zeal was cooling. The disappearance of the Soviet empire and the defanging of Iraq also freed up Iran's and Israel's own resources. Suddenly, both states found themselves unchecked. Without an Iraq that could balance Iran, Tehran could soon become a threat, Israeli strategists began to argue. Once the dust had settled, the two former strategic allies were caught in a vicious rivalry for the future order of the region. The Jewish State had the most to lose from any changes in the regional order because of its strong ties to Washington, which were largely based on Israel's role as a bulwark against Soviet penetration in the Middle East. Iran, which had grown to detest the

isolation it found itself in, thought it could emerge the winner from these changes.

SADDAM STRIKES AGAIN

On August 2, 1990, almost a year after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Iron Curtain divide, Saddam Hussein invaded yet another neighbor, Kuwait, to take over Kuwait's oil fields. Within months, the George H. W. Bush administration carefully assembled a coalition of states under the UN flag and defeated the Iraqi army and restored Kuwait's ruling family, the House of Sabah. The Iraqi army was decimated. Iraq's annual military expenditure dropped from \$26.4 billion in 1990 to \$2 billion in 1991, and its armed forces, which numbered 1.4 million in 1990, dropped to 475,000 by the end of the war. But even though Iraq's defeat was monumental, it did not cease to be a vital military player in the region. With an army of approximately half a million men, Iraq could still pose a major threat to its immediate neighbors.

Saddam's foolish move brought with it many firsts. For the first time, a leading pan-Arab state went to war with another Arab state, poking a big hole in the idea of pan-Arabism. For the first time in decades, a much-weakened Soviet Union and the United States saw a conflict eye to eye, enabling the Security Council to authorize the use of force to repel an invading army. And for the first time, the United States went out of its way to attract Arab states to a regional coalition while keeping Israel at arm's length. In an effort to sabotage Bush's creation of an Arab anti-Iraq alliance, Saddam tried to link Iraq's occupation of Kuwait with Israel's control over Palestinian territory. In an effort to win sympathy on the Arab streets, Saddam offered to leave Kuwait if Israel relinquished its hold on Palestinian land. To avoid that linkage and the perception that Washington was leading a campaign against Islam, or that the conflict was between the West and the Arab world, Washington needed the inclusion of Arab states in the alliance. And the Arabs could be brought in only if Israel was excluded.

This new political dynamic—in which Israel was a liability rather than a strategic asset to the United States—was most worrisome to Tel Aviv, even though the destruction of Saddam's war machine greatly benefited Israel. Much to Israel's anger, both the United States and the United Kingdom used the promise of resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict as a carrot to convince the Arab states to join the anti-Iraq coalition. To make matters worse, William Waldegrave, British minister of state at the Foreign Office, stated in Parliament that, in the new Middle East order, Israel had ceased to matter. Walde-

grave told the House of Commons that the United States should learn that a strategic alliance with Israel "was not particularly useful if it cannot be used in a crisis such as this. . . . [N]ow the U.S. knows that an alliance with Israel that is of no use for this situation is useless."¹

Even when Saddam Hussein hurled thirty-four Scud missiles at Tel Aviv and other Israeli cities, in an obvious attempt to lure Israel into the war, the United States told Israel "in the strongest possible words" that it needed to keep itself out of the Iraq operation because Israeli retaliation would cause the collapse of Washington's anti-Iraq alliance.² For the government of Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, this was a very tough decision. Saddam's missile attacks damaged Israel's public morale; the country's otherwise lively and noisy capital quickly turned into a ghost town. Bush sent Undersecretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger to Israel to assure the leaders of the Jewish State that the United States was doing all it could to destroy the Iraqi missile launchers.

But neither the Israel Defense Forces nor the Ministry of Defense was convinced. Instead, a feeling prevailed among Israel's leaders that Washington was untrustworthy and that it could not be relied upon when it came to Israel's existence. Bad blood was created between Israel and the United States, according to Efraim Halevi, the former head of the Mossad. Washington's protection of Israel was ineffective, and the image that Israel was relying on the United States for protection was hard to stomach for ordinary Israelis.³ Shamir's decision to accommodate the Americans was extremely unpopular, because it was believed that it "would cause irreparable damage to Israel's deterrent capabilities."⁴ To make matters worse, people around Shamir felt that the United States did not reward Israel for, in their view, effectively enabling the coalition to remain intact by refusing to retaliate against Iraq. This new, tense relationship between Tel Aviv and Washington heightened Israeli fears of the changes the new world order could bring about.⁵ For Iran, the war brought both danger and opportunities. Though the United States had failed to reciprocate Iran's goodwill measures in Lebanon, Saddam's invasion of Kuwait provided Iran with another opportunity to show that the United States could benefit from improved relations with Tehran. It also showed the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states that they needed Iran to balance Iraq.⁶ Iraq's aggression against a fellow Arab state was a moral victory for Tehran, as it demonstrated the Arabs' shortsightedness in previously supporting Iraq.⁷

Iran came out strongly against Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and used Saddam's aggression to remind the international community that Iraq—and

not Iran—was the real threat to regional peace and security.⁸ It adopted a policy of “positive neutrality,” opposing Iraq’s occupation and refusing to aid Saddam, while at the same time remaining outside the U.S. anti-Iraqi alliance. But “positive neutrality” was in essence a pro-American policy, even though Iran publicly criticized the United States for seeking to find a pretext to find a foothold in the Persian Gulf for its military—a fear that Iran had held since the time of the Shah.⁹ “The Iraqis even came and begged for our support,” explained Mahmoud Vaezi, Iran’s deputy foreign minister at the time, “but we declared that our policy was neutral in the war, which in reality meant that it was a policy *against* Iraq.”¹⁰

Behind the scenes, Iran communicated with the United States to avoid any misunderstandings, permitted the U.S. Air Force to use Iranian airspace, and denied Iraqi requests for support. On top of that, Iran kept a check on the refugee problem (millions of Iraqis fled to Iran and Turkey after the end of the war), refused to return Iraqi jets that Iraq had flown to Iran for safekeeping, and, perhaps most importantly, refrained from aiding the uprising of Iraq’s Shia population against Saddam at the end of the war, a move that helped prevent Iraq from disintegrating into a sectarian civil war. These helpful steps even won Iran praise from U.S. Secretary of State James Baker.¹¹

FRIENDS TURN TO FOES

The security environment in the Middle East changed dramatically as a result of the Persian Gulf War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union on December 31, 1991, which effectively ended the Cold War. As the bipolar international order transformed into a unipolar world led by the United States, the Middle East moved in a different direction. Out of the rumble, Iran and Israel emerged as the region’s most powerful states in a Middle East that increasingly took on a bipolar nature. As powers rose and fell, new alliances were forged and new enmities created.

The disappearance of the Soviet bear from Iran’s northern border led to a considerable warming in Tehran-Moscow relations.¹² Fearing Washington’s increased maneuverability against Iran as a result of the end of the Cold War, Iran made ties with Moscow a priority. Russia was no longer a threat but a partner.¹³ But in Afghanistan, the Soviet collapse brought new dangers for Iran. The Soviet withdrawal left in its wake a power vacuum filled by warring factions, which plundered the country and brought misery as great as the Soviet occupation. By the mid-1990s, this power vacuum was filled by the Taliban, supported by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. The Taliban

in turn provided a haven for al-Qaeda. These Sunni fundamentalists hated Iran with a passion, a point that did not pass unnoticed in Tel Aviv and Washington.¹⁴ The al-Qaeda leadership declared early on that the world of Islam faces three great threats: Christians, Jews, and Shias.¹⁵ Because the Taliban and al-Qaeda posed both a military and an ideological threat, Iran extended significant support to the anti-Taliban resistance throughout the 1990s. By the end of the decade, the Afghan threat was no longer a theoretical matter, as Taliban forces executed eleven Iranian diplomats in the northern Afghan city of Mazar-e Sharif, an incident that almost led to a full-scale war between Iran and the Taliban.

But as the Soviet threat to Iran vanished, the American threat grew only more ominous. In its war with Iraq, the United States had become a major power in the Persian Gulf—waters traditionally considered to be part of Iran’s backyard. America was now inside Iran’s sphere of influence with forces that could topple the regime in Tehran.¹⁶ “The U.S. managed to portray Iran as a greater threat to the Arabs than even Israel,” said Mohammad Reza Tajik, an adviser to former Iranian President Mohammad Khatami. “This had a crucial impact on our thinking. The U.S. sold more weapons to the Arabs as a result and became the hegemon of the Persian Gulf. Consequently, Iran came under direct U.S. threat.”¹⁷ Iran’s rearmament program, which, according to British scholars Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Raymond Hinnebusch, was modest and defensive and cost only a fraction of what the Shah spent on arms, was partially in response to the perceived U.S. threat.¹⁸

Iraq, on the other hand, continued to figure as Iran’s primary threat, in spite of its defeat at the hands of the U.S. Army. Though severely weakened, it was still seen as the only regional country able to threaten Iran’s territorial integrity.¹⁹ “I never had the confidence that [the Iraqis] would miss an opportunity to destroy Iran. And they gave me every reason to further believe that,” explained Ambassador Javad Zarif, who led Iran’s negotiations with Iraq both during and after the Iraq-Iran war.²⁰ The devastating psychological effect of the Iraq-Iran war and Saddam Hussein’s continued reign in Baghdad left Iran simply with little choice but to focus on Iraq as a military threat. Many military strategists in Iran and Iraq believed that another confrontation was inevitable, with the marked difference that the next conflict would see the use of weapons of mass destruction at the very outset.²¹ “We knew that as long as Saddam was in power, he would do all he could to seek revenge,” said Deputy Foreign Minister Mahmoud Vaezi.²² Both Iranian and Iraqi war colleges continued to plan against each other,

and Iran's rearmament throughout the 1990s was primarily aimed at containing the Iraqi threat, a point that did not escape Israeli officials.

The Iraq-Iran war had revealed Iran's vulnerability to ballistic missiles, as Iraq had easily targeted the Iranian capital with Scuds fired from deep inside Iraqi territory. Determined to fix this hole in their defenses, the Iranians embarked on an ambitious program to develop long-range missiles, Israeli intelligence services found out in late 1994.²³ Soon after the Persian Gulf War Iran began to develop a ballistic missile based on the North Korean Nodong-1. The Shahab-III, as it was called, had a range of nine hundred miles and could reach Israel. Iran didn't successfully test-fire the missile until 1999, however, and, according to Israeli sources, it would take a few more years before the missile would be fully operational.²⁴ In spite of the range of the missiles, Tehran maintained that it had only defensive motives in mind. In the words of Mahmoud Sariolghalam, adviser to Iran's National Security Advisor Hassan Rowhani: "The perception has been that because Iran does not have any security partners . . . it is out on its own to defend itself [. . .] it is correct to say that Iran after the war never had an offensive strategy against any country. It was always defensive. The leadership learnt the hard way not to engage in war . . . the political and the economic and the social cost of engaging in a war is well understood, so it's always been a defensive strategy. The Shahab and the rest are [a] mechanism to maintain an infrastructure of deterrence."²⁵

Around this time Iran also slowly restarted the Shah's nuclear energy program. Ayatollah Khomeini had suspended the program, arguing that nuclear weapons were "un-Islamic."²⁶ Still at an embryonic stage, the Iranian nuclear program lacked uranium centrifuges and much of the know-how to develop nuclear weapons—even if one assumes that weaponization was the Iranian goal. A comprehensive U.S. intelligence review from 2005 revealed that Iran would likely be able to manufacture the key ingredient for a nuclear weapon no sooner than 2015.²⁷ (The Iranian nuclear program accelerated in the late 1990s, and after two and a half years of intrusive inspections the International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA] did not find evidence for an Iranian nuclear weapons program, but neither has it been able to confirm that the Iranian program is entirely peaceful.²⁸)

Even though Iran's missile program eventually would put Israel within its reach, Tehran continued to regard Israel as a nonthreat and a distant foe at most, just as it had in the 1980s. The Iranians did not worry about the military intentions of the Jewish State, even though Israel's capabilities—

which included an arsenal of missiles and F-15E fighters, not to mention several hundred nuclear weapons—were growing.²⁹ "There was a lot of rhetoric against Israel, but Iran never really saw Israel as a threat," explained a prominent Iranian political thinker.³⁰

The setbacks Iran experienced during the Iraq-Iran war led it to moderate its political ambitions. Increasingly Iran viewed only the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf as Iran's security environment, rather than the entire Middle East. This put Israel outside of Iran's own definition of its sphere of influence. "I follow every single statement that an Iraqi leader makes," explained Zarif. "I follow every single statement that an American leader makes because I consider them in our national security environment. I don't necessarily see Israel in our national security environment."³¹ Rather than a military threat, Israel was a political threat to Iran's interest and influence in the region.³² "Israel has always been seen as a country that would try to sabotage Iran's position. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many felt that Israel would try to create a base in the new central Asian republics against Iran. Initially, Tehran feared that Armenia would play this role; but it became Azerbaijan," said Ali Reza Alavi Tabar, a prominent Iranian reformist.³³ The Israeli game in the central Asian states, aimed at preventing Iran from spreading its influence north, meant that Tel Aviv was upping the ante, the Iranians believed.³⁴

SECURITY IN IRAN'S BACKYARD

The defeat of Iraq and the need to create a new post-Saddam order in the region was a major opportunity for Iran to regain the role it had lost as a result of the excesses of the revolution and the damage from its war with Iraq. Convinced that its size and power destined it to be the preeminent state in the Persian Gulf, Tehran had much to gain and little to lose from any change in the region's order.³⁵ The path to this objective was clear—improved relations with the United States and the GCC states. Iran's policy of positive neutrality was warmly appreciated by the Arab sheikdoms of the Persian Gulf. Even Saudi Arabia, which Khomeini three years earlier had called an enemy of Islam, recognized Iran's new pragmatism in 1991 and extended an invitation to Rafsanjani to visit the Kingdom. Anti-status quo policies and ideological rigidity wouldn't bring Iran closer to its geopolitical goals, the leadership around Rafsanjani had concluded. Only months after the end of the Persian Gulf War, Iran and Saudi Arabia normalized their relations, in yet another sign that post-Khomeini Iran had shelved much of its revolu-

tionary zeal.³⁶ For Tehran to so clearly contradict the decrees of Khomeini was, in the view of many experts, a clear sign that nationalism had defeated ideology in Iranian foreign policy-making.³⁷

Rafsanjani coupled his outreach to Iran's Arab neighbors with a policy of "development first, rearmament second." Iran significantly cut its arms spending. Its military forces shrunk from 654,000 in 1988 to an average of 480,000 in the 1990–1999 period, and its military expenditure dwindled from \$9.9 billion in 1990 to \$5.3 billion in 1995. This wasn't mere demobilization following a war; it was a strategic decision made despite the lack of a final peace agreement between Iran and Iraq. As a result, Iran's armed forces were only slightly larger than those of Iraq *after* Saddam's defeat in the Persian Gulf War. Though Iran's new orientation did not escape the notice of decision-makers in Washington, they failed to appreciate the full extent of its new pragmatism.³⁸ Having found a foothold in the Persian Gulf, the Bush administration knew that its military presence in the region could continue only as long as the GCC states needed Washington to protect them from Iraq—and Iran. A significant warming of GCC-Iranian relations could jeopardize America's position in the Persian Gulf.³⁹

But this did not dissuade Tehran from seeking a greater role in that region. Iran's leaders felt the time had arrived for Washington to recognize Iran's power and accept Iran as a regional leader. "It was the perfect time for Iran to reassert its position. The circumstances were in our favor," explained Alavi Tabar.⁴⁰ On the eve of Iraq's defeat, Rafsanjani said as much himself: "There is only one power that can provide the peace and stability of the Persian Gulf, and that is Iran's power."⁴¹ Iran reached out to the GCC states in a bid to create a new inclusive security architecture in the Persian Gulf that would make the GCC less dependent on the United States.

The Iranians had already envisioned an opportunity to create such an order in the 1980s. At the insistence of Iran, UN Security Council Resolution 598, which put an end to the Iraq-Iran war, included an operative clause requesting the UN to consult *regional* states in efforts to enhance the security and stability of the area. In the spirit of that resolution, Iran emphasized the concepts of self-reliance and nonintervention by external powers, included in the GCC charter, to convince the Arabs that the security of the region should rest in the hands of regional states only (as Iran had done under the Shah). Iran was particularly concerned about Egypt and Syria's initiative, the GCC+2, which would make the security of the Persian Gulf "Arab" by including Egypt and Syria in the collective security arrangement but excluding Iran. Just as in the days of Nasser, Egypt under President

Hosni Mubarak sought an opportunity to penetrate the Persian Gulf region. "The Gulf states did not want to depend anymore on Iraq to counterbalance Iran, so we thought that what they were looking for was another Arab balancer, in other words Egypt and Syria, which would counterbalance Iran in nonstrategic conflicts," explained Nabil Fahmi, Egypt's ambassador to the United States.⁴²

America, however, had a different order in mind. Having defended the Arabs against Saddam, the GCC states felt indebted to the United States and could do little but take Washington's wishes into consideration.⁴³ American pressure formed the options facing the GCC—to seek a Middle East order with Iran, or an Arab order with the United States. By offering the GCC states bilateral security deals, Washington preempted a common Persian Gulf security arrangement and managed to continue Iran's exclusion from regional decision-making. In the end the GCC states accepted these bilateral deals, and the Arab-Iranian honeymoon was effectively cut short.⁴⁴ Iran would soon realize that neither Washington nor Tel Aviv was eager to see Iran come in from the cold. But first, Israel had to sort out its own squabbles with America.

THE U.S.-ISRAELI SQUABBLE

For better or worse, the unipolar world put many of Israel's previous security assumptions into question. Undoubtedly, the collapse of the eastern front (Iraq) and the disappearance of the Soviet threat improved Israel's security environment. Suddenly, all conventional military threats against Israel almost completely evaporated.⁴⁵ This monumental geopolitical shift improved Israeli security in three ways. First, it put an end to Moscow's military support to Israel's Arab foes, particularly Syria, effectively eliminating the Arab military option. The Arabs no longer had a superpower to rely on. Most importantly, Iraq no longer constituted a realistic threat to Israel.⁴⁶ "There was no more eastern front, as they used to call it," Ehud Yaari of Israel television's Channel 2 explained.⁴⁷ Yitzhak Rabin, who was to become Israeli prime minister in 1992, summed up the implications of this development for Israel as follows: "Arab countries hostile to Israel can no longer rely on the Soviet umbrella that protected them in the past, whether militarily, politically, or economically."⁴⁸ Russia also lowered its political profile in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, much to Tel Aviv's satisfaction.

Second, the fall of Communism opened the gates to the millions of Jews residing in the Soviet Union. Israel, always aware of its demographic war against the Palestinians, welcomed a huge influx of Russian Jews as a

counter to the Palestinians, who had a higher birthrate than that of the Israelis.⁴⁹ In only a few years, more than one million Jews from the former Soviet Union immigrated to Israel.⁵⁰ Third, by invading Kuwait, Saddam killed pan-Arabism as a viable political and ideological force in the Arab world. “[The war] demonstrated politically that pan-Arabism was a myth,” said Keith Weissman of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.⁵¹

As the conventional military threats disappeared, Israel’s focus turned to new threats: the internal threat posed by an increasingly rebellious Palestinian population living under occupation, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, and challenges to Israel’s special relationship with Washington.⁵² The most-immediate threat was the Palestinian uprising—the Intifada. Israelis were taken aback by the Palestinian ability to continue resisting over such a long period of time (the Intifada broke out in December 1987 and continued, though with gradually decreasing intensity, at least up to the Gulf War in 1991). “It was quite disturbing to people. I think it shook the foundation of enough folks who were in the center that something needed to be done to change the dynamics of the Israel-Palestinian interaction,” said Dan Kurtzer, U.S. Ambassador to Israel.⁵³ The cost of the occupation was becoming too high, and the disintegration of Palestinian society was in and of itself a danger. By virtue of the occupation, Israel was by default responsible for the problems in the Palestinian territories. The Palestinians were collapsing in the arms of Israel, in poverty and in total social disintegration, according to Yaari.⁵⁴ (Later, during talks between Israeli and Palestinian envoys in Norway that paved the way for the Oslo agreement, Israel’s chief negotiator, Uri Savir, told his Palestinian counterpart Abu Ala that “the occupation is corrupting our youth. We want to free ourselves from it.”)⁵⁵

The other challenge was maintaining Israel’s special relationship with Washington. Any shift in the regional order could undermine the Jewish State’s strategic significance precisely because its position had been so favorable. During the Cold War, Israel played a key strategic role as a pro-Western outpost in a Middle East threatened by Soviet penetration. But with the Soviet Union gone, and U.S.-Arab relations at a peak, the Israeli alliance risked becoming obsolete to Washington. The Bush administration’s promise to address the Palestinian issue immediately after the Persian Gulf War, and the Shamir government’s resistance to making any territorial compromises, did not improve Israel’s standing. The Gulf War showed Israel that the Soviet collapse had given Washington much more leeway with

the region’s Arab states, and that the demand for Israel’s services as a reliable pro-Western ally in the muddy waters of Middle East politics had declined as a result. In many ways, Israel even became a liability to Washington.⁵⁶

With U.S.-Arab relations already warming, a breakthrough in U.S.-Iranian ties could wipe out what little strategic significance Israel retained. Unlike Israel, Iran was strategically located right between the world’s two largest reservoirs of oil and natural gas: the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea. Iran bordered the newly freed but landlocked central Asian states, which sat on major reserves of oil and natural gas and held the promise of becoming major markets for Western goods. With a population of more than sixty million, Iran itself offered a market that was ten times larger than that of Israel. As the Cold War ended, the Jewish State wrestled with the question of how to prove its strategic utility to the United States.⁵⁷

Washington’s eagerness for Middle East peacemaking after the Gulf War pushed U.S.-Israeli relations to a new low. The United States was at the apex of its power and needed to show the world that it would use its diplomatic muscle to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian issue once and for all. “It was time to seize the moment because . . . something potentially significant [was] stirring among the Arabs,” Secretary of State Baker felt. The new attitude of the Arabs could convince Israel to opt for peace, he optimistically believed.⁵⁸ But Baker was in for a surprise. Shamir and Israel’s Likud government were not in the mood to be convinced, nor were they excited about Washington’s new confidence in Middle East peacemaking, suspecting that it was fueled by the Bush administration’s debt to Syria and Egypt for their support in the Persian Gulf War. “There was a feeling that there was an inherent danger in this,” explained Halevi, the former head of the Israeli Mossad. “The United States might feel a necessity to tilt towards the Arabs. . . . The conditions of peace would be such that it would not be acceptable to Israel.”⁵⁹

Though Shamir faced opposition at home, primarily from Labor’s Rabin—who opposed the key tenets of neo-Revisionist Zionism by arguing that the dream of Greater Israel (*Eretz Israel*) had to be given up and that no military solution existed to the Palestinian problem—he continued to resist Washington’s pressure. But Israel had few cards to play except stalling Washington’s peace efforts and creating new facts on the ground. Since 1989, the Bush administration had been sparring with the Shamir government over its illegal settlements on occupied Palestinian territory. Though Shamir had assured Bush that these activities would be stopped, Israel did not keep its

word, as Baker acknowledged. The squabble was often heated. At one point Baker even banned Israel Deputy Foreign Minister Benjamin Netanyahu from the State Department after Netanyahu had publicly accused the United States of "building its policy on a foundation of distortion and lies."⁶⁰

In May 1991, Zalman Shoval, Israel's ambassador to the United States, said Israel would soon ask America for \$10 billion in loan guarantees to help provide housing for the influx of Soviet immigrants. Though the request marked an escalation in Israeli aid requests, it also enabled the United States to link American aid to Israel's settlement policy. In September 1991, Israel formally made the request, only a month before a major U.S.-sponsored peace conference was scheduled to take place in Madrid. Bush resisted the Israeli request. He asked Congress to delay consideration of the request to avoid damaging Baker's effort to put together the conference. After months of battling over this issue with Israel and the pro-Israeli lobby in Washington—less than a year away from the 1992 presidential elections—Baker told Shoval on January 24, 1992, that the United States would accept existing settlements, but the loan guarantees would be granted only on condition that no new settlements be built. Bush clarified his position in very candid language in March of that year. "The choice is Israel's," he said. "She can determine whether she wants to take action which would permit the strong support of both the legislative and executive branches for these loan guarantees or not." But Israel refused to accept the American conditions and on March 17 Bush officially rejected Israel's request.⁶¹ (After Rabin came into office later that year, the Bush administration agreed to give Israel the guarantees after all, with mild restrictions.)

Another sticking point was the question of negotiations with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). Though the United States was in no mood to forgive PLO leader Yasser Arafat for his embrace of Saddam during the Gulf War, it knew that a peace process without Arafat was a nonstarter. Shamir, on the other hand, used the principle of non-negotiation with terrorists as a justification for evading Washington's peace efforts altogether. During a heated telephone conversation between Bush and Shamir, Bush clarified that the United States was "not trying to force [Israel] to talk with the PLO. But we do wish there could be less delay in responding factually to us. . . . If you give us a positive response, then Israel and the U.S. can move forward together. If you don't respond, we have to interpret that you don't want to go forward. . . . I've just read the wire story quoting you about a confrontation with the United States. If you want that—fine." The tensions in U.S.-Israeli relations were fittingly summed up by Baker's brusque public

message to Israel, "When you're serious about peace, call us." Clearly, U.S.-Israeli relations were at a low.⁶²

By October 1991, Shamir had run out of excuses, and Washington managed to drag the Israelis to the peace summit in Madrid. Shamir had one condition, though: to avoid creating circumstances that would enable the international community to force Israel to go back to its 1967 borders, the Likud leader requested that the summit not be the permanent fixture that would be used to resolve the conflict. In other words, the conference would not be an ongoing event that would be convened to address the progress of the negotiations. Rather, it would meet only to initiate the talks, and then later, at the end of the negotiations, it would meet to recognize whatever outcome the negotiations had produced.⁶³ According to Kurtzer, what finally drove Shamir to Madrid was that Washington managed to convince the Likud leader that:

On three levels Israel's position had changed so much for the better that the risks of entering a peace process were about as low as they could be. First, the global level in the fall of the Soviet Union, which literally coincided with Madrid. . . . Second, the regional upheaval, not only the defeat of Iraq in the war, but the process in which we mobilized a coalition that included Arab states that were prepared to join former Western colonial powers in repelling aggression by an Arab state. And third, the domestic factors. It must have been the third or fourth year of the first Intifada. The Palestinians clearly had not attained their objectives. They were clearly looking for a way to translate what was a failed militant strategy into some sort of a political process, and Israel, though more successful in stopping the violence at that period, had also failed to translate its successes into some kind of political victory.⁶⁴

Bush had declared that all peoples of the region would have a say in the formation of the new order of the Middle East, and Baker worked extensively to ensure that regional states had a stake in the process so that it wouldn't be "easy to walk away from it." Washington's success in ensuring the participation of Israel, Syria, and the Palestinians alike reflected its new position of strength. Virtually every nation in the region was invited with one noted exception—Iran.⁶⁵

MAKING PEACE IN MADRID

The Madrid conference was a celebration of America's new global position as the sole superpower. Though the Soviet Union was still a few months

away from crumbling, the writing was on the wall. The great powers co-chaired the conference, but from the very outset it was clear who was calling the shots. The conference convened on October 30, 1991, with two separate yet parallel negotiating tracks, one bilateral and one multilateral. The bilateral track encompassed the first-ever direct talks between Israel and its immediate Arab neighbors, aimed at resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and at finding peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors. The multilateral negotiations were meant to build the Middle East of the future. This track, which opened in Moscow in January 1992, focused on key issues that concerned the entire Middle East—water, environment, arms control, refugees; economic development, and, most importantly, regional security.

The invitations went out to a large number of countries. The main participants were the governments of Israel, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. (Per Israel's demand, the Palestinians wouldn't have a delegation of their own, but Palestinians who were not official PLO members could attend as part of a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation.) Egypt, the European Community, and the GCC states were also invited as participants, while the United Nations was invited to send an observer representing the secretary-general. Altogether forty-three nations participated in the multilateral talks, of which fifteen were regional states. At a time when Tehran believed that its opportunity had come to be accepted as a regional power and be included in Middle East decision-making, Washington dashed Iran's hopes by refusing to invite it.

In many ways, Washington failed to appreciate Iran's pragmatism, in particular Tehran's new position on Israel, in which Rafsanjani had declared that Iran would agree to any solution acceptable to the Palestinians. "We didn't see any readiness on their part to be part of a peace process with Israel," recalled Dennis Ross, special Middle East coordinator at the White House at the time. Washington failed to pick up on Iran's readiness because of the image of Iran as an inherently anti-American nation, formed by a decade of tensions between the two countries. As Ross put it: "Certain images get formed, and when they are formed, even when there are behaviors that seem to contradict the image, if there are other images at the same time that tend to confirm it, you give much more weight to those that tend to confirm it, and you dismiss those that should point you in a different direction. . . . The signals from Rafsanjani tended to be dismissed, but they were there. The behaviors that actually tended to fit with the traditional images [of Iran] were treated as if that was the real Iran."⁶⁶

Others in the White House viewed Iran in the 1990s as more rather than less radical. The assassination of former Iranian Prime Minister Shahpour Bakhtiar in Paris in August 1991—reportedly by Iranian agents—showed that Iran was "irredeemable," because the murder took place while Iran was seeking improved relations with Washington, these elements argued. At a minimum, Iran's seemingly contradictory behavior raised the political cost of reaching out to Tehran.⁶⁷ And because Washington did not have any diplomatic relations with Iran, there was no interest in inviting states that could act like spoilers.⁶⁸ "Our relations [with Iran] were pretty bitter," Scowcroft recalled. "We were not at that time ready to include Iran."⁶⁹

But there was another factor as well—Iran was simply viewed as irrelevant to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Iran's relations with and leverage over the Palestinians were considered insignificant precisely because of its lack of active involvement in the Palestinian cause.⁷⁰ "Iran simply had nothing to contribute. It had no leverage over the Arabs, so how could it help the peace process?" Scowcroft argued.⁷¹ This view was held by the Israelis as well, who felt that Iran had little to offer on this matter. "Iran was irrelevant. It had no influence over the Palestinians, unlike Egypt and the Arab states, so its participation would have been unnecessary," an Israeli diplomat at the UN explained.⁷² (A few years later, however, both Israel and the United States would blame the failure of the peace process on Iran's influence over the Palestinians.)

Iran wasn't just irrelevant to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the minds of Washington's decision-makers; it was irrelevant *period*. While Baker's team feared that Iran could act as spoiler to the conference if it was invited, they forgot to take into account Iran's ability to play a damaging role if it *wasn't* invited. At that unipolar moment, Washington simply did not see Iran as a power to be reckoned with—America's confidence was bordering on hubris. This was "America's moment in the Middle East," Kurtzer explained. "Everything was going our way. All systems were go. And Iran was a problem for us, but so what? We had everything else."⁷³

Tehran reacted bitterly to Washington's snub. With or without influence over the Palestinians, Iran viewed itself as a major regional power and expected a seat at the table, particularly after the helpful role it felt it had played in gaining the release of hostages in Lebanon and indirectly aiding in the U.S.-led war against Iraq.⁷⁴ Madrid was, after all, not seen as just a conference on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but as the defining moment in forming the new Middle East order—one in which Tehran hoped to play a

role commensurate with its geopolitical weight. The noninvitation deprived Iran of an opportunity to help shape the new order according to its own interests.⁷⁵

To make matters worse, Syria's invitation to the conference threatened to break the Tehran-Damascus alliance and limit Iran's presence in and access to the Levant—a key strategic asset in which Iran had invested heavily.⁷⁶ This would be a major blow to Iran's influence and to its vision of its rightful position in the region.⁷⁷ (Iranian fears were not unfounded. Israel, concerned about Iran's support for Hezbollah guerrillas in Lebanon and increased Iranian power in the wake of Iraq's defeat in the Gulf War, called on Syria at Madrid to agree that Iran must be excluded from the framework and that Iranian-Syrian relations should be downgraded.⁷⁸) "It definitely insulted Iran; there is no doubt about that," Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Hadi Nejad-Hosseini recalled.⁷⁹ Numerous Iranian officials told me that Tehran had been willing to participate in the talks and exert its influence and role provided it would not have to recognize Israel.⁸⁰ (Recognition of Israel was not requested of any of the conference's participants.) This fits well with Iran's other initiatives, because the conference was held while Iran was intensifying its efforts to reintegrate into the international community. "Getting into these bodies was exactly what Iran was aiming for at the time," Siamak Namazi of Atieh Bahar Consulting said.⁸¹ A decade later Iran played a crucial role in the Bonn conference after the 2001 U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. This shows that Iran is eager to participate in such regional conferences when invited, said former Iranian President Mohammad Khatami's adviser Tajik. "Iran would have accepted an invitation to Madrid," he explained. "We accepted a role in the Bonn conference on Afghanistan and we wanted to participate in Madrid as well."⁸²

The noninvitation to Madrid was in many ways the last straw for Rafsanjani's policy of détente with Washington. Already, Iran felt that its policy modifications and outreach had failed to be recognized and appreciated by the Bush administration. First, Washington chose to keep Saddam in power and let a good portion of the Iraqi Republican Guard remain intact to balance Iran.⁸³ "This was done on purpose," explained Col. Lawrence Wilkerson, former Secretary of State Colin Powell's chief of staff. "Just enough of the troops were kept not to be a threat to Iraq's neighbors, but well enough to balance Iran."⁸⁴ Second, Washington preempted the creation of an inclusive security architecture for the Persian Gulf. "It was the first time that Iran did a grand gesture. It sold on credit, [and] it got nothing in return," Namazi recalled. "[Iran] clearly felt that the policy of isolation would be in place no

matter what it did."⁸⁵ Rafsanjani's goodwill gestures carried significant domestic political risk, and fewer and fewer officials around the Iranian president were willing to pay the cost of flirting with the United States. "The willingness to do positive work for America almost ended, because they never reciprocated. Whatever positive Iran did, the response was always more and more isolation," complained Masoud Eslami of the Iranian Foreign Ministry.⁸⁶

Washington's failure to reciprocate Iranian gestures—even though Tehran's expectations may have been exaggerated—strengthened the hands of Iranian rejectionists, who argued that Washington would never come to terms with Iran voluntarily. Slowly Rafsanjani's policy of moderating Iran's foreign policy and drawing it closer to the Western bloc began to collapse.⁸⁷ Convinced that Washington wouldn't grant Iran its legitimate role in the region, Tehran concluded that it was left with no choice but to make America's nonrecognition as costly as possible by sabotaging its policies.⁸⁸ This conviction "prompted Iran to turn to Palestinian and Lebanese groups that shared the Iranian outlook," Tabar noted.⁸⁹ The Israeli-Palestinian issue was one of the few in which Iran could undermine the United States. Rafsanjani began adopting a sharper position on Israel and departed from his original line of accepting the wishes of the Palestinians.⁹⁰ In hindsight, Ross recognized that excluding Iran from Madrid was of greater significance than many thought at the time. "I think it's fair to say that we didn't look that closely at it, and in retrospect perhaps we should have . . . Iran just didn't get that much attention."⁹¹

As soon as it became clear that an invitation to the conference wasn't forthcoming, Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, gave a green light to Ali Akbar Mohtashamipour—one of the cofounders of the Lebanese Hezbollah who during the 1980s had lobbied Ayatollah Khomeini to actively confront Israel—to organize a conference in opposition to Madrid.⁹² This was a watershed moment, as Iran for the first time started to seriously reach out to rejectionist Palestinian groups, in spite of the Shia-Sunni divide and their enmity dating back to the Iraq-Iran war. Only a year earlier Iran had even reduced its financial support to Hezbollah in Lebanon.⁹³ Iran took the political lead against the Madrid conference, a position it wouldn't have taken had Washington invited it to participate, according to Ruholla K. Ramazani of the University of Virginia, the foremost expert on Iranian foreign policy.⁹⁴

The rejectionist conference in Tehran coincided with the Madrid meeting and included militant Palestinian groups that, like Iran, saw U.S. medi-

ation efforts as countering their interests.⁹⁵ Tehran ratcheted up its rhetoric against Israel and charged Arab governments that supported the peace process with treason, using its “Arab street” card to undermine the pro-Western Arab governments. It continued to refrain from confronting Israel directly, either conventionally or through the use of terror. There were still no terrorist acts against Israel with Iranian fingerprints, according to Israeli sources.⁹⁶ To Tehran’s relief, the Madrid conference did not produce the breakthrough Washington had hoped for. The Shamir government was a reluctant participant from the outset and did little to make the negotiations succeed. As Madrid’s failure became clear, hopes rose in the Rafsanjani camp that Washington would understand that change in the region couldn’t take place without Tehran’s cooperation. But before Rafsanjani could muster any new outreach to Washington, the Israeli Labor Party, recognizing the likely consequences of any new Middle East order for Tel Aviv’s strategic standing, brought about a sharp shift in Israel’s foreign policy.

trading enemies

We needed some new glue for the alliance [with America].
And the new glue . . . was radical Islam. And Iran was radical Islam.

—Efraim Inbar, Begin-Sadat Center

The Israeli public was exhausted when it went to the polls in June 1992. Several years of the Intifada, the Palestinian uprising that had begun in December 1987, had taken its toll on the Jewish State.¹ Israelis realized in increasing numbers that the occupation—which Israel had generally justified on security grounds—had become a security threat itself. “The occupation was no longer a routine that we could safely ignore. Israelis were worn out from the conflict and wanted peace, and peace of mind,” wrote Uri Savir, who later negotiated the Oslo peace accord with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).² Constantly at odds with each other, Likud and Labor presented two different perspectives on Israel’s dilemma. Yitzhak Shamir and the Likud Party preferred the status quo—the Palestinians were a problem but it was impossible to make a deal with them. Israel would win neither peace nor security by compromising with the Arabs, they argued. Israel would be secure in the long run if it held on to the occupied territories and expanded its settlements. Even though Washington would protest, Israel would prevail if it remained firm, the Likud believed.

The Labor Party argued that some of the settlements could be sacrificed. Resources should be diverted from the settlement project to Israel itself to better absorb the influx of Soviet Jews. This was more important to Israel, because the Jewish State’s primary security threat was no longer ter-

the Iranians took the lead in making grandiose speeches about the Palestinian cause, they seldom tried to live up to the standards they set in their statements. European diplomats in contact with representatives of Islamic Jihad and Hamas who visited Iran after the Intifada broke out reported that both groups were utterly disappointed with their Iranian hosts. Tehran provided them with neither money nor weapons. A joke in the streets of Tehran reflected Iran's pretense: "Why aren't there any stones left to stone the adulteress? Per the order of the Supreme Leader, all the stones have been shipped to Palestine as Iran's contribution to the Intifada."¹¹⁴

betrayal in afghanistan

States like these [Iran, Iraq, and North Korea], and their
terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil.

—President George W. Bush (State of the Union Address),
January 29, 2002

The entire world was holding its breath as America suffered through "indecision 2000." For Israel and Iran, the outcome of the six-week presidential election dispute could become the single most important factor determining the future of the Middle East. In both capitals, it was thought that if Al Gore and Joe Lieberman won, they would continue the Clinton administration's Middle East policies: strong support for Israel and the Middle East peace process, along with significant pressure to sanction and isolate Iran (even though Clinton, toward the end of his presidency, sought to reach out to Iran). Rightly or wrongly, the Iranians believed that Clinton's greatest mistake was that he let Israel dominate America's foreign policy in the Middle East and that he unnecessarily linked Iran's long-standing but resolvable problems with the United States to Iran's bitter rivalry with Israel.¹

It was thought that a George Bush–Dick Cheney White House, on the other hand, could bring back the foreign policy approach of the elder George Bush—pressure on Israel to withdraw from Palestinian territories, greater sensitivity to the interests of Washington's Arab allies, and an energy policy that wouldn't cut off American oil businesses from major markets such as Iran. After all, Dick Cheney, George W. Bush's vice-presidential running mate, had as the CEO of the American energy service company Hal-

liburton severely criticized the Clinton administration's economic sanctions on Iran. There was little doubt who Israel and Iran rooted for as they anxiously watched the ballots in Florida being counted and recounted.

On December 9, the U.S. Supreme Court approved the machine recount in Florida that gave Bush the victory in that state—and nationwide. Despite having lost the national popular vote by more than half a million votes, Bush won the electoral vote and became the first president since Benjamin Harrison in 1888 to be elected despite receiving a minority of the popular vote. Immediately, fears spread in Israel that Washington would soften its stand on Iran, ease Clinton's economic sanctions, and narrow its efforts to block Tehran's nuclear program.²

The Israelis had reason for concern. Shortly after the elections, American oil executives met with Iran Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi in New York, and Bush's nominee for secretary of state, Gen. Colin Powell, told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee during his confirmation hearing that Washington should bring more nuance to its Iran policy.³ Clearly, Powell wanted to change course in the Middle East, but Iran wasn't necessarily high on the Bush administration's foreign policy agenda.⁴ If anything, Iran was once again overshadowed by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. On Bush's inauguration day, President Bill Clinton called Powell to discuss the Middle East. What was supposed to be a brief conversation about what went wrong with the peace process and how it could be put back on track turned into a forty-minute discussion that almost caused the incoming secretary of state to arrive late to the inauguration ceremony. Clinton squarely blamed PLO leader Yasser Arafat for the failure to reach peace and hardly ever mentioned Iran—in spite of Israel's attempts to paint Tehran as a key spoiler of the peace process. Much like his predecessor, Powell believed that a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian problem would create an opening to Iran, and not the other way around. And even if he wanted to open up to Iran, Powell believed that he would have a harder time selling the idea of a U.S.-Iran dialogue to the pro-Israel lobby in the United States than to the Israeli government itself.⁵

While Israel was preparing for its worst-case scenario—the Labor Party's Ephraim Sneh, who now served as Prime Minister Ehud Barak's deputy defense minister, said that “if indeed the U.S. adopts a conciliatory approach to Iran . . . the implications are that we will need to face this threat alone”—Israel's allies in Washington were gearing up for a fight.⁶ The Iran Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA) was due to expire in August 2001, and the powerful pro-Israel lobbying organization American Israel Public Affairs Com-

mittee (AIPAC) feared that the Bush administration would try to terminate it. Instead of waiting for Bush and Powell to make their move, AIPAC took advantage of the disorganization in the White House that followed the election conflict.

“Indecision 2000” had deprived the Bush administration of more than six badly needed weeks to organize the administration and fill key posts in the State Department and elsewhere. More than three months into his presidency, Bush still had not found many of the people who would head his government agencies, including those who would be responsible for policies on Iran. AIPAC's machinery, however, was in great shape. The pro-Israel lobby began laying the groundwork for ILSA's renewal on Capitol Hill, and by mid-March—before Bush had even formulated a position on ILSA—AIPAC had gathered more than three hundred cosponsors in the House (the bill needed only 218 votes to pass). Though the sanctions had failed to change Iran's foreign policy, AIPAC still hailed ILSA as a great success. AIPAC Executive Director Howard Kohr urged the House International Relations Committee to renew ILSA because it had “met the test and proven its effectiveness over time” and because “Iranian behavior demands it.”⁷ The pro-Israeli Washington Institute for Near East Policy argued that ILSA's renewal would help Iran's “real moderates” and hurt the “so-called moderates” around President Mohammad Khatami, who shared the “anti-Israel policies set by Iran's hard-line clerical leadership.”⁸ The Bush administration was quickly outmaneuvered; through its preemptive work on Capitol Hill, AIPAC checkmated Bush and saw the sanctions bill pass with overwhelming numbers in both chambers. Still, cautious optimism characterized Iran's approach to the United States during the first months of the Bush administration, and a lull reigned in the war of words between Tehran and Tel Aviv.⁹ All that was to change on the morning of September 11, 2001.

SEPTEMBER 11

On September 11, 2001, America discovered that the real Islamic threat did not lay in Shia Iran—as Israel had insisted since 1991—but in extremist elements in the Sunni world. Nineteen extremists loyal to Osama bin Laden, the founder and leader of the Sunni al-Qaeda terrorist organization that was sheltered by the Taliban government in Afghanistan (which was itself supported and funded by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan), hijacked four jet airliners and flew one into each of the two towers of the World Trade Center in New York, one into the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and one into a field in rural Pennsylvania. The world didn't change on that day, but America

did—and Washington's response to the cataclysmic terror attack would eventually bring more turmoil to the Arab and Muslim world. That evening Powell ordered a small group of his top staffers to work through the night to produce a strategy for assembling an international coalition to take out Osama bin Laden. The plan became the blueprint for the diplomatic strategy around "Operation Enduring Freedom"—America's war against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan.¹⁰ To win against the Taliban, the United States needed more than overall international support—it needed the specific support of Iran, Afghanistan's neighbor and a bitter enemy of the Taliban.

Throughout the 1990s, Iran had been the primary sponsor of the Northern Alliance, a group of anti-Taliban forces led by the legendary guerrilla fighter Ahmed Shah Massoud. Together with Russia and India, Iran had armed and funded the Northern Alliance at a time when the United States was turning a blind eye to the Taliban's human rights violations and its support for terror. Having a staunchly anti-Iranian and anti-Shia government in Afghanistan hardly undermined the Clinton administration's overarching goal of isolating Iran. That policy came back to haunt America a few years later. But now, the Iranians were eager to offer their help to Washington and show America the strategic benefits of cooperation with Iran. "The Iranians had real contacts with important players in Afghanistan and were prepared to use their influence in constructive ways in coordination with the United States," recalled Flynt Leverett, then senior director for Middle East affairs in the National Security Council.¹¹ The plan that had been prepared by Powell called for cooperation with Iran that would be used as a platform for persuading Tehran to terminate its involvement with anti-Israeli terrorist groups in return for a positive strategic relationship with Washington.¹²

The plan incensed Israel. Suddenly, much like after the end of the Cold War, events in the Middle East risked making Israel a burden rather than an asset to the United States, while giving Iran a chance to prove its value to America. If a U.S.-Iran dialogue was initiated, there would be "a lot of concern in Israel," Yoossi Alpher, an adviser to Barak and a former Mossad official, told me. "Where are we [Israel] in this dialogue? Will the U.S. consult with us about our needs and fears? Will we be part of some package deal with Iran and if so, what part?"¹³ Alpher's comment reflected Israelis' inherent fear about their relations with the United States: would the United States protect Israel's interests in geostrategic conflicts in which the interests of the two allies were not necessarily aligned? More specifically, Israel

feared that a U.S.-Iran rapprochement wouldn't entail Iranian missile disarmament or Iranian recognition of the Jewish State. American geopolitical interests, they thought—particularly the need to contain China's rise by controlling Beijing's access to energy through Iran—could prompt Washington to sacrifice its commitments to Israel.

A flare-up in Israeli-Iranian tensions that neither the Camp David talks nor the Al-Aqsa Intifada managed to ignite erupted as a result of September 11 precisely because an earth-shattering event shook the foundations of the status quo in the Middle East and forced all states to reassess their position and role in the post-9/11 era. With Britain as the go-between, Washington courted Iran while it kept Israel at arm's length. And just as the British government had done in 1991 regarding the Persian Gulf War, Britain Foreign Secretary Jack Straw suggested that Israel was partly to blame. In a statement that the Israelis called an "obscenity" and a "stab in the back," Straw implied that terrorism and the festering Israeli-Palestinian dispute might be linked to the 9/11 attacks.¹⁴

Israel and U.S. neoconservatives, who had found their way back to the corridors of power after Bush's election, had a different plan in mind: America should put all the actors it accused of supporting terror on notice—particularly Iran and the Palestinian Authority. In a letter signed by forty-one prominent neoconservatives, including William Kristol, Richard Perle, and Charles Krauthammer, Bush was urged to target not only al-Qaeda, but also Hezbollah and demand that Iran and Syria immediately cease all military, financial, and political support for that organization. If they refused to comply, Bush should "consider appropriate measures of retaliation against these known state sponsors of terrorism."¹⁵ Starting a war with Iran and Syria could overstretch the United States, but it would also put America and Israel on the same side in the war and increase—rather than decrease—the United States' need for Israel.

At first, the neoconservatives made only modest progress. As the United States was beginning its military operations in Afghanistan, State Department and National Security Council officials began meeting secretly with Iranian diplomats in Paris and Geneva in October 2001, under the sponsorship of Lakhdar Brahimi, head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.¹⁶ The contacts were initiated by Ambassador James Dobbins, the Bush administration's special envoy for Afghanistan. Fully supported by Powell, Dobbins told Brahimi that he would like to meet with the Iranians, and within a few days officials from the Iranian Foreign Ministry contacted Dobbins to offer their assistance. In the initial meetings German and Italian

delegations also attended to provide Iran and the United States political cover. Their attendance gave the talks, which soon were dubbed the Geneva Channel, a multilateral appearance. In reality, however, the discussions were bilateral and the highest-level contacts between officials of the two countries since the Iran-Contra scandal.

The talks progressed better than expected. The discussions focused on "how to effectively unseat the Taliban and, once the Taliban was gone, how to stand up an Afghan government," and the Iranians gave extensive assistance to the United States in the war, unaware of what was about to unfold after the success in Afghanistan.¹⁷ The Iranian diplomats impressed their American and European counterparts tremendously with their knowledge and expertise about Afghanistan and the Taliban. And Iran's help was not negligible. The Iranians offered their air bases to the United States, they offered to perform search-and-rescue missions for downed American pilots, they served as a bridge between the Northern Alliance and the United States in the fight against the Taliban, and on occasion they even used U.S. information to find and kill fleeing al-Qaeda leaders.¹⁸

Though Dobbins's mandate was limited to talks on Afghanistan, a tight-knit group around Powell had prepared a secret comprehensive package of carrots on a stick to offer the Iranians. Unlike the Pentagon, the State Department favored a strategic opening to Iran, not just tactical discussions. The American diplomats realized that the cooperation over Afghanistan could be extended to cover al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations. The United States and Iran could expand their intelligence-sharing cooperation and coordinate more robust border sweeps to capture al-Qaeda fighters who were fleeing into Pakistan and Iran. Ryan Crocker, a member of the American negotiating team who was charged with discussing general issues, knew about the package. Crocker, along with like-minded colleagues at the State Department, was ready to implement Powell's proposal at the drop of a hat—if only the president would approve it. But hard-liners in the White House worked strenuously to prevent Bush from going along with it. "[Vice President] Cheney and [Secretary of Defense Donald] Rumsfeld were always there to sabotage our cooperation in Afghanistan if it got too far," said Colonel Wilkerson, Colin Powell's chief of staff.¹⁹

Nowhere was the common interest of the United States and Iran more clear than during the Bonn Conference of December 2001, at which a number of prominent Afghans and representatives from various countries, including the United States and Iran, met under UN auspices in the former German capital to decide on a plan for governing Afghanistan. The United States

and Iran had carefully laid the groundwork for the conference weeks in advance. Iran's political clout with the various warring Afghan groups proved to be crucial. It was Iran's influence over the Afghans and not America's threats and promises that moved the negotiations forward. It was also the Iranian delegation—and not Dobbins—that pointed out that the draft of the Bonn Declaration contained no language on democracy or any commitment on behalf of Afghanistan to help fight international terrorism. Curiously enough, Dobbins's instructions contained nothing about democracy.

By the last night of the conference, an interim constitution had been agreed upon and all other issues had been resolved except the toughest one—who was to govern Afghanistan? The Northern Alliance insisted that, as the winner of the war, the spoils should be theirs. Though they represented about 40 percent of the country, they wanted to occupy eighteen of the twenty-four ministries. Around 2 a.m., Dobbins gathered the Afghan parties, the Iranians, the Russians, the Indians, the Germans, and Brahimi of the UN to resolve this final sticking point. For two hours the different delegations took turns trying to convince Yunus Qanooni, the representative of the Northern Alliance, to accept a lower number of ministries, but to no avail. Finally, the Iranian lead negotiator—Javad Zarif—took the Afghan delegate aside and began whispering to him in Persian. A few minutes later, they returned to the table and the Afghan conceded. "Okay, I give up," he said. "The other factions can have two more ministries." This was a critical turning point, because the efforts by other states to convince Qanooni had all failed. "It wasn't until Zarif took him aside that it was settled," Dobbins admitted in retrospect. "We might have had a situation like we had in Iraq, where we were never able to settle on a single leader and government." The next morning, the historic Bonn agreement was signed. America hadn't only won the war, but, thanks to Iran, it had also won the peace.²⁰

For the Iranians, this was a moment of triumph. Not only had a major enemy of Iran—the Taliban—been defeated, Iran had also demonstrated how it could help stabilize the region and how America could benefit from a better relationship with Tehran. Hinting at Iran's willingness to expand the discussions to include other areas, Zarif at one point told Crocker jokingly that now that the Afghan issue had been resolved, perhaps it was time to address the nuclear dispute that divided the two countries. Without hesitation, Crocker put the ball back in Zarif's court and asked if he should pull up his instructions on that file, indicating that the State Department had already prepared talking points on the matter. Zarif, however, did not have

authority to go beyond Afghanistan at that time even though the Iranians treated the discussions as a strategic opening.²¹ "It was consistent with their behavior that they wanted strategic talks," Dobbins explained, while pointing out that the Iranians didn't reveal their full intent until much later.²²

The Iranian dilemma was that the agenda for the discussions—Afghanistan, the nuclear issue, terrorism—included only *American* concerns. Iran's concerns with U.S. policies were nowhere to be found. While Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei and President Khatami fully supported the Afghan talks and the idea of a strategic opening to Washington, broader talks would have to include Iranian as well as American concerns, they insisted.²³ For the State Department and for National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, this wasn't a problem. Both wanted to explore a greater opening with Iran, but they were hindered by some in the White House who were passionately anti-Iranian.²⁴ "I saw no glimmer of interest outside of State" for a strategic discussion with the Iranians, Dobbins recalled. In spite of Iran's central aid to the United States in Afghanistan, there was no real receptivity to Iranian goodwill measures in the Bush White House. It was 1991 all over again: There was no appreciation for Iran's strategic interest in a stable Middle East and the possibility that Tehran wanted to patch up relations with the United States. Not even Iran's pledge at the Tokyo donor conference in January 2002 to offer Afghanistan \$500 million—by far the largest pledge by any country at the conference, including the United States—impressed hard-liners in the Bush White House.

Iran's offer to help rebuild the Afghan army—under U.S. leadership—in order to strengthen the Afghan government vis-à-vis the various warlords who still controlled parts of the country also fell on deaf ears. "We're prepared to house, pay, clothe, arm, and train up to twenty thousand troops in a broader program under your leadership," the Iranians told Dobbins during one of the meetings in Geneva. Dobbins pointed out that if Iran and the United States shared the responsibility of training the troops, they would end up working with two different doctrines. The Iranian commander, who had accompanied the Iranian delegation to discuss the offer with Dobbins, just laughed and said, "Don't worry, we're still using the manuals you left behind in 1979." There would be no problems with the loyalty of the troops, either, he explained, because Iran was still paying for the Afghan troops the United States was using to mop up Taliban and al-Qaeda elements on the Afghan-Pakistan border. "Are you having any difficulty with their loyalty?" the commander asked Dobbins rhetorically.²⁵

Dobbins returned to Washington to brief key administration officials

on the unprecedented Iranian offer, which he concluded was intended as a friendly gesture. He first briefed Powell, who then set up a briefing with Rice. She concurred that the offer should be explored, and a third meeting was set up with Powell, Rice, and Rumsfeld. This time, however, Dobbins ran into a brick wall. Throughout the entire meeting Rumsfeld did not utter a word. Staring intently at Dobbins, he took a few notes but never showed any real interest in the proposal. Right there, the proposal died. "To my knowledge, there was never a response," Dobbins said. "There was a disposition not to take Iranian offers seriously and not to give them any broader meaning." Moreover, Dobbins argued, the administration's disinterest in a broader strategic opening was "because Washington largely focused on Iran's behavior towards Israel" rather than on its behavior toward America.²⁶

Israel was alarmed by Washington's cooperation with Iran. In an unusually harsh rebuke of Bush, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon publicly suggested that Bush was acting like 1937–1940 British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, selling out Israel the way Chamberlain had sold out the Czechs by refusing to confront Adolf Hitler.²⁷ Tensions between the United States and Israel already had begun before September 11. Powell had developed a new Middle East initiative envisioning Jerusalem as a shared capital between Israel and a Palestinian state—a noticeable departure from previous American positions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For Likud, an undivided Jerusalem as Israel's eternal capital was a non-negotiable red line. The Bush administration's new policy threatened to transform Sharon from an American ally into an unyielding obstacle. Sharon's personal attack on Bush did little to ease the tensions. The comments incensed the thin-skinned American president, and White House press secretary Ari Fleischer called Sharon's remarks "unacceptable."²⁸

The Israeli-American tensions had not escaped Iran. The Khatami government felt increasingly confident that the gridlock in the Israeli-Iranian-American triangle could be broken in Iran's favor. Valiollah Shojapurian, an Iranian lawmaker belonging to the reformist camp, credited Khatami's policy of détente and warned of Israel's anger at Iran's success. "This international approval of Iran has terribly angered our staunch enemy Israel but it has given us a new opportunity to rebuild our international ties," he told *Aftab-e Yazd*, an Iranian daily.²⁹

Neoconservatives in Washington and the Israeli government tirelessly sought ways to put a halt to the U.S.-Iranian cooperation. Through various means they tried to shut down the Geneva Channel and preempt any possi-

bility that Bush would commit a Nixon-goes-to-China with Iran—that is, reach out and befriend a major U.S. foe. One approach was to manipulate the Iranians into closing the channel themselves. The idea was to encourage or provoke a radical ayatollah into criticizing the talks as a way of currying favor with Iranian extremists, which would in turn force the supreme leader to back out of the channel. Ironically, neoconservatives who had played a leading role in the Iran-Contra scandal now attempted to sabotage the very political breakthrough they had fought for fifteen years earlier. After having been shunned from government for more than a decade, Michael Ledeen, the neoconservative friend of Israel former Prime Minister Shimon Peres who in the 1980s sought a U.S.-Iran dialogue together with the Israelis—and who was believed at one time by the CIA to be “an agent of influence of a foreign government”—found his way back into the corridors of power after the Bush election in 2000.³⁰ His access to the president was through Bush’s top adviser, Karl Rove, with whom he met periodically.³¹ As the Freedom Scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, Ledeen began writing a weekly column for *National Review* in 2000 in which he repeatedly argued for targeting Iran. Ledeen expressed his dissatisfaction with the slow pace of Washington’s march against Iran by concluding his articles with “Faster, please. Faster.”³²

The collapse of the Soviet Union and defeat of Iraq in the 1991 Persian Gulf War had led to Ledeen’s 180-degree turn. Just as Israel did, he now saw Iran as a rival that needed to be isolated and weakened rather than as a potential ally with whom to engage and strengthen. In December 2001, Ledeen, who now served as a consultant to Undersecretary of Defense Douglas Feith, organized a meeting in Rome with his old friend of Iran-Contra infamy, Manuchehr Ghorbanifar, the Iranian charlatan and arms dealer deemed a “serial fabricator” by the CIA. As a student of the Italian fascist movement, Ledeen enjoyed extensive contacts within the Italian intelligence service and also invited Nicolo Pollari, the head of Italy’s military intelligence agency, SISMI, and Italy’s Minister of Defense Antonio Martino.³³ Also attending were several exiled Iranians; Larry Franklin, a Defense Intelligence Agency Iran analyst who would later plead guilty to spying for Israel in 2005 and who is currently serving a thirteen-year prison sentence; and Harold Rhode, a Middle East expert who played a key role in the Iran-Contra scandal.³⁴ Franklin and Rhode were part of a small, tight-knit group of neoconservative hard-liners on Iran favoring regime change in Tehran and were determined to put an end to Powell’s diplomacy. Later on, their policy network at the Pentagon would include the Office of Special

Plans, an alternative intelligence shop led by Douglas Feith that provided the American intelligence apparatus with inaccurate information that helped pave the way for the war with Iraq.³⁵

The meetings were organized in Europe because Ghorbanifar couldn’t obtain a U.S. visa following his past encounters with the CIA. Ledeen carefully kept the State Department and the CIA in the dark about the sensitive meeting, contrary to standard protocol regarding contact with foreign government intelligence agencies. But word quickly reached U.S. Ambassador to Italy Mel Sembler, as well as the CIA station chief in Rome, and the matter soon reached the highest levels of the Bush administration. After an intervention by CIA Director George Tenet himself, Feith and Ledeen were ordered to cease all contacts with Ghorbanifar and his entourage.³⁶ But the damage had been done. The Iranians had gotten word of the meetings and were infuriated that high-level U.S. officials would meet with Ghorbanifar and other Iranian exiles who by now had turned against the clerical regime. But whatever damage Ledeen and Ghorbanifar managed to inflict on the Geneva Channel, it was nothing compared to what was about to unfold.

KARINE A AND THE “AXIS OF EVIL”

On January 3, 2002, Israel intercepted the ship *Karine A* in international waters in the Red Sea. Captained by a member of the Palestinian navy, the ship contained Katyusha rockets, mortars, rifles, machine guns, sniper rifles, ammunition, anti-tank mines, and other explosives. The Israelis contended that the ship had come from the Iranian island of Kish. Because most of the weapons were still in their factory wrappings and clearly marked as having been produced in Iran, the Israelis argued that the conclusion was obvious: Iran was attempting to arm Arafat’s Palestinian Authority in violation of the Palestinian Authority’s agreements with Israel. This was the smoking gun the Israelis needed to halt the U.S.-Iran dialogue and put an end to Washington’s pressure on Israel to deal with the Palestinians.³⁷ It was a heaven-sent gift for Sharon, and it conveniently coincided with the visit to Israel of Gen. Anthony Zinni, Bush’s new envoy to the Middle East. To many, it was almost too good to be true—so good that even Israel’s allies began questioning the validity of the story. The normal route for Iranian shipments to its proxies went through Damascus and Lebanon—by air, they argued, and not by boat around the Arabian Peninsula, where the Israeli navy was known to patrol.

The Iranians denied having any connection to the ship, but no denials could dent the image of Sharon inspecting the ship and its Iranian-pro-

duced arms. Washington accepted the Israeli side of the story and described the Israeli evidence as "compelling." To the Bush administration, any doubt that may have existed about Iran's continued ties to terrorism was removed.³⁸ This was a major setback for proponents of dialogue with Iran such as Powell. "It put Powell back on his heel about what was possible to achieve with the Iranians," Wilkerson said.

In Iran, President Khatami was taken off guard. He ordered a meeting of the Iranian National Security Council to learn who was behind the shipment. Khatami was well aware that rogue elements existed within the Iranian government who at every turn sought to undermine his détente with the United States. But no one on the council admitted to having knowledge of the shipment. Through the Geneva Channel, the Iranians immediately contacted Dobbins and informed him of Khatami's meeting with the council. The Iranian diplomats were instructed to request from the United States evidence about the shipment's origins so that authorities in Tehran could act on it. At the same time, the Khatami government sent a message to Washington through the Swiss embassy in Tehran, denying any involvement in the affair. It repeated the request for information from the United States and offered to give Washington any information Iran might uncover. But neither the message to Dobbins nor the memo sent via the Swiss was taken seriously by the Bush administration. Washington never provided Tehran with any evidence for the Israeli claim, but it did respond to Tehran a few weeks later and asserted that the information it had was reliable and sufficient, effectively dismissing Tehran's denial.³⁹

To the ever-suspicious Iranians, the entire affair was bogus. It served one purpose only, they believed: to undermine the Geneva Channel. "In a matter of a few days, a policy of cooperation was transformed into a policy of confrontation," Zarif said. "*Karine A* continues to be a mystery that happened at an exactly opportune moment for those who wanted to prevent U.S.-Iran engagement."⁴⁰ In retrospect, even some Bush administration officials have begun to question the affair. Some speculate that it was staged by the Israelis. Others argue that rogue elements in Iran may have been behind it. But no one in the Bush administration pursued the matter further; once the U.S. intelligence service corroborated the Israeli account, it became sacrosanct. "But subsequently, we have all pondered on whether it was a hoax or not," Wilkerson admitted.⁴¹

Quite apart from speculation about the origin and details of the *Karine A*, few question the effect it had on Washington's approach to Tehran. Within a few days, Pentagon officials made a flurry of accusations against

Iran, charging it with providing safe haven to fleeing al-Qaeda fighters in order to use them against the United States in post-Taliban Afghanistan. But the accusations rested on shaky grounds. Per the request of the United States, Iran had increased its troop strength on the Afghan border, and it had brought a dossier to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan on 290 al-Qaeda members whom Iran had detained. Many of these detainees were later repatriated to Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and other Arab and European countries. "I wasn't aware of any intelligence supporting that charge," recalled Dobbins. "I certainly would have seen it had there been any such intelligence. Nobody told me they were harboring al-Qaeda."⁴²

Then, on January 29, 2002, in Bush's first State of the Union address, he lumped Iran together with Iraq and North Korea as dangerous and threatening states that formed an "Axis of Evil." Whether Iran was included in the axis for rhetorical reasons or whether Bush believed that Iran, Iraq, and North Korea were collaborating, one thing is certain: the *Karine A* incident contributed directly to Iran's membership in Bush's club of evils.⁴³ Tehran was shocked. Khatami's policy of détente and the help Iran provided the United States in Afghanistan was for naught. Having seen his domestic agenda fall apart, Khatami's international standing was now also given a blow. He had stuck out his neck and argued against hard-liners in Tehran, whose skepticism about America's trustworthiness appeared to have been proven right.⁴⁴ "Axis of Evil" was a fiasco for the Khatami government," said Farideh Farhi, an Iran expert at Hawaii University. "That was used by the hard-liners, who said: If you give in, if you help from a position of weakness, then you get negative results."⁴⁵

Ironically, Iran had called the United States the Great Satan for more than two decades by the time Bush referred to Iran as evil. Clearly, both states had made use of their share of excessive and counterproductive rhetoric. But there are few examples where such an undiplomatic statement was made at such a sensitive time—just weeks after Iran had proved itself an indispensable ally in Afghanistan. Hard-liners in Tehran, as well as some members of the Iranian delegation negotiating with the Americans, argued that Iran shouldn't have offered the United States help without exacting a price up front. "Iran made a mistake not to link its assistance in Afghanistan to American help in other areas and by just hoping that the U.S. would reciprocate," Zarif argued. Some of these diplomats were later forced to pay for the fiasco with their careers, making others in Iran's foreign policy circles think twice before extending a hand of friendship to the Bush administration.

Tehran's immediate reaction to the Axis of Evil speech was to close down the Geneva Channel in protest. Washington had yet again failed to reciprocate Iranian goodwill, and had instead punished Iran for its support, the Iranians reasoned.⁴⁶ In their last meeting with Dobbins, the Iranians protested the Axis of Evil comment. Dobbins explained that the United States still had many disagreements with Tehran, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and that the cooperation in Afghanistan, while very helpful, did not change that reality. On most issues, the United States and Iran were still at odds, he pointed out. The Iranian response crystallized the opportunity that the Axis of Evil comment likely had squandered. "We would have liked to have discussed those matters too," the Iranians said, unveiling to Dobbins Tehran's intentions of using the channel and the cooperation on Afghanistan to resolve outstanding issues between the United States and Iran.⁴⁷ For the Iranians, it was particularly bewildering to be lumped with Saddam Hussein, Iran's bitter enemy.⁴⁸

But Bush's comments didn't spark anger in Tehran alone. The speech, and the term, was heavily criticized in the United States as well—including by U.S. officials (though they seldom made their criticism public until after they had left office). Dobbins felt that it was "ludicrous" and "ridiculous" to suggest that Iran, Iraq, and North Korea formed an axis. "It was a bit like suggesting that the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany should be treated equally after Germany had invaded the Soviet Union," he told the New America Foundation in August 2006.⁴⁹ He warned Rice that the speech could induce Iran to retaliate by destabilizing Afghanistan. But Rice was unmoved by the warning and dismissed Afghanistan and Iran as relatively unimportant. The United States had greater plans in mind, she told Dobbins, and neither Iran nor Afghanistan mattered much in the greater picture.⁵⁰ Powell's staff echoed Dobbins's concerns, but the secretary of state "didn't see a major problem with it [the speech]."⁵¹

The *Karine* story gave new life to Israel's long-standing campaign to have the international community declare Iran a state sponsor of terror.⁵² Peres ordered the publication of a "black book" for distribution around the world. "This black book will reveal all the facts concerning the actions of the ayatollahs' regime against Israel," he said. "It will contain all the calls from Iranian leaders for the destruction of Israel, as well as details on its nuclear programme aimed at achieving this aim."⁵³ Iran, in turn, called for the United Nations to set up a criminal court to try Israeli officials for war crimes.⁵⁴ Soon, the rhetoric spilled over into direct threats. Israel threatened to attack Iran's nuclear installations at Bushehr, and the Iranians re-

sponded by threatening to attack Israel with ballistic missiles if Israel violated Iranian sovereignty.⁵⁵

At one point, the rhetoric became so aggressive that both Washington and Israeli generals intervened to defuse tensions. In February 2006, Washington asked Sharon to soften his tone toward Iran.⁵⁶ That same month, the head of Israel's National Security Council, Gen. Uzi Dayan, reminded his colleagues in Tel Aviv that Iran had to be depicted as a global threat, not just a threat to Israel. Iran is "not an enemy for Israel," Dayan told Israel's army radio. "We shouldn't threaten Iran— from our point of view Iran is not an enemy—but we should make sure that Iran does not manage to procure weapons of mass destruction."⁵⁷ But in spite of the Axis of Evil speech and Israel's efforts to isolate Iran, Tehran never turned against America in Afghanistan. By the time the Iranians stopped showing up for the Geneva meetings, the major obstacles in Afghanistan in the fight against the Taliban and in setting up the new Afghan government had already been overcome. But soon the Iranians would need to find their way back to Geneva, because shortly after the Afghan war they realized that hard-liners in Washington had all along been planning to extend the war to Iran's western neighbor—Iraq.

-facing the future, facing reality

Who dominates the Middle East—Iran or the United States?
—Former German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, May 29, 2006

Since the end of the Cold War, Israel and Iran's rivalry has stood in the way of many of America's strategic objectives in the Middle East. Both states have undermined U.S. policies that they deemed beneficial to the other. Iran worked against the Middle East peace process to prevent the United States from creating what Tehran feared would be an Israel-centric Middle East order based on Iran's prolonged isolation. Israel, in turn, opposed talks between the United States and Iran, fearing that a U.S.-Iran rapprochement would grant Iran strategic significance in Washington at Israel's expense precisely because Iran was a powerful country that shared many global interests with the United States, in spite of their conflicting ideologies.¹

The United States could benefit from a powerful Iran serving as a buffer against Chinese access to Persian Gulf and Caspian Basin energy resources, just as Iran had served as a buffer against the Soviet Union before the collapse of Communism. Israel feared a strong, missile-equipped, and potentially nuclearized Iran that neither it nor Washington would be able to influence much.² While many in Israel felt that the Jewish State couldn't compete with Iran at the strategic level—in terms of being of value to the United States—others argued that Israel's special relationship with the United States wasn't based on strategic interests to begin with. The special relationship is "based on a kind of affinity," explained Shlomo Brom of the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies. "It is based on the fact that a large sector

in the U.S. population support Israel: the Jews, the Christian Right, and others. It is based on common values.”³

Neither Israel nor Iran—nor indeed the entire Middle East—has overcome the geopolitical earthquake that shook the region after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Israel and Iran’s fear that the creation of a new order in the region would benefit the other is acute precisely because the Middle East lacks a geopolitical basis for its frail order. The recurring process of establishing a new and stable balance brings to the surface and intensifies regional rivalries. Not only has the Soviet collapse yet to be absorbed, but the full consequences of America’s defeat of the Taliban and Iraq are still to be known. To make matters worse, Washington has sought to establish an order that contradicts the natural balance by seeking to contain and isolate Iran, one of the most powerful countries of the region. Even if an artificial order could be established based on the exclusion of a regional giant like Iran, it won’t be able to stand on its own legs and will last for only as long as the United States is willing to invest in its upkeep. The price, however, is becoming increasingly onerous for the United States.

The conflict between Iran and Israel wasn’t sparked by an ideological difference, nor is it ideological fervor that keeps it alive today. Certainly, this does not mean that the ideologies of these states are irrelevant; at a minimum, the rhetoric they produce makes a political accommodation more difficult. Anti-Zionist views are held by most, if not all, Iranian officials. But the impact of the ideological orientation of these leaders on Iran’s foreign policy is a different matter altogether. The major transformations of Israeli-Iranian relations have all coincided with geopolitical rather than ideological shifts. The Shah began distancing himself from Israel after Iran had become so strong that it could neutralize the Arab threat and befriend the Arab states from a position of strength. At that point, Iran increasingly viewed its relationship with Israel as a burden rather than an asset. The Shah’s failure to win Arab support for his leadership position, partly a result of his close ties to Israel, prompted the revolutionaries to seek a different formula to bridge the Arab-Persian divide—political Islam. That orientation intensified Tehran’s need to oppose Israel, even though clandestine security ties with the Jewish State continued.

The most dramatic turn for the worse in Israeli-Iranian relations came in the early 1990s, with the end of the Cold War and the defeat of Iraq in the Persian Gulf War. Ironically, Iran’s ideological zeal was sharply declining in those years. While Iranian foreign policy has always had an ideological component, ideology has been translated into operational policy in relation

to Israel only when coupled with a strategic interest, as was the case in the post-Cold War era.⁴ “The Israelis are against Iran having an important, or number-one, role in the region. As a result, they are against Iran’s development,” explained Mohsen Mirdamadi, who headed the Foreign Relations Committee in the Iranian Parliament in the late 1990s. “So this is a strategic conflict we have with Israel. And if we were looking at it ideologically, we would still oppose Israel.”⁵

When Iran’s ideological and strategic interests collided, as they did in the 1980s, strategic considerations consistently prevailed. For the Iranians, this is not a contradiction but a simple fact of life. Ideology is not an absolute for the rulers in Tehran. Former President Hashemi Rafsanjani admitted as much at a Friday prayer sermon. “We have made inappropriate measures or never made any measures. And we have delayed making decisions. Our ideology is flexible. We can choose expediency on the basis of Islam.”⁶ On another occasion, Rafsanjani rejected the notion that Iranian foreign policy should be based on ideological principles in which the state would have to act according to its duties (*vazifeh*) under Islam, regardless of the consequences it would suffer. “To put the country in jeopardy on the ground that we are acting on [an] Islamic basis is not at all Islamic.”⁷ According to former Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Maleki, Iran’s foreign policy has long ceased to be ideological. “Ideology means that we must have pro-Muslims policies in all of the world. Yes, we claim that we are pro-Muslims in all of the world . . . but we didn’t support Chechen Muslims. If ideology was the first motivator for Iranian foreign policy, Iran must do that. But Iran didn’t.”⁸ As much as the Iranian leaders may have wanted to pursue their ideological goals, no force in Iran’s foreign policy is as dominant as geopolitical considerations.⁹

In spite of Israel’s rhetoric to the contrary, many high-level decision-makers in Tel Aviv recognize this and contend that Iran’s ambitions are independent of the Islamist nature of its ruling regime. “What had been for the Shah an ambition built on nationalism was for his successors a parallel ambition built on an Islamist radicalism that often simply served as a thin disguise for nationalism,” argued Barry Rubin, director of the Global Research in International Affairs (GLORIA) Center in Herzliya. The Iranian endgame, as the Israelis see it, has not differed much from the time of the Shah.¹⁰ “The Persians want hegemony! They always have, they always will,” an old Iran hand in Israel told me bluntly.

When one scratches the surface, even Iran’s President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s venomous outbursts against Israel turn out to have strategic

motivations. Ahmadinejad did something few Iranian leaders had done before him—he questioned the Holocaust. (The previous president, Mohammad Khatami, had carefully avoided these excesses.) “Today, they have created a myth in the name of Holocaust and consider it to be above God, religion and the prophets,” Ahmadinejad told a crowd in the fall of 2005 in the southeastern Iranian region of Zahedan. “If you [Europeans] committed this big crime, then why should the oppressed Palestinian nation pay the price?” he continued. “You [Europeans] have to pay the compensation yourself.” Immediately, the president of the UN Security Council issued a statement denouncing the Iranian president’s comments. The Europeans, not surprisingly, were infuriated and threatened to join the United States in taking a much harsher position against Iran. The swift international backlash took Tehran by surprise, sparking an intense internal debate within the government. The statements angered Iran’s nuclear negotiators, who had been conducting delicate talks with the Europeans since 2003 over Iran’s nuclear program. The rhetoric undermined their fine-tuned balancing act that sought simultaneously to avoid referral to the Security Council and to defend Iran’s right to uranium enrichment; they maintained:

The camp around Ahmadinejad forcefully argued that Iran should enlarge the conflict and make Israel a critical and visible part of the international debate on Iran’s nuclear program. Viewing it in isolation only benefited the West. By expanding the scope of the debate, Iran would find the necessary levers to defend its position. At a minimum, the Ahmadinejad camp argued, a cost should be imposed on Israel for having made the Iranian nuclear program a subject of grave international concern and for having convinced Washington to adopt a very hawkish policy on the matter. Ahmadinejad’s opponents in the more moderate camp agreed on the necessity of putting Israel on the defensive and enlarging the debate, but they strongly differed as to the best way to achieve those objectives. According to a senior Iranian official, people close to Ahmadinejad favored putting into question issues Israel had managed to settle over the past two decades: Israel’s legitimacy and right to exist, the reality of the Holocaust, and the right of European Jews to remain in the heart of the Middle East. Such an approach, they argued, would resonate with the discontented Arab street and reveal the impotence of the pro-U.S. Arab regimes, which would be in equal parts pressured and embarrassed.

Just as Iran had done in the early 1980s, it again sought to neutralize the pro-Western Arab governments in the region by playing to the Arab street. If the nuclear standoff was framed as an American-Israeli assault on an Is-

lamic Iran that stood up for the Palestinians, it would be next to impossible for Arab governments—however much they disliked Tehran—to publicly oppose Iran because that would make them appear to be siding with Israel. This was an old Iranian trick; the Israelis are well familiar with it, though they have little with which to counter it. “In my view this remains, even with this nuclear thing, the main purpose of Ahmadinejad’s incendiary rhetoric,” explained Shlomo Ben-Ami, Israel’s former foreign minister. “If the discourse in the Middle East is an Arab discourse, Iran is isolated. If it is an Islamic discourse, then Iran is in a leading position. And always with the view of protecting Iran and the Iranian revolution, which is why they tried all the time to oppose the peace process.”

More moderate voices in Tehran strongly opposed this approach because of the difficulties they predicted it would cause for Iran’s nuclear diplomacy. They favored Khatami’s tactic of invoking the suffering of the Palestinian people and Israel’s unwillingness to make territorial concessions, but avoiding hot-button issues such as Israel’s right to exist or the Holocaust. Taking the rhetoric to such levels, they argued, could backfire and turn key countries like Russia and China against Iran. Part of this debate played out publicly in the pages of Iran’s press. *Shargh*, a reformist daily that Ahmadinejad later shut down for criticizing him too openly, published an editorial blasting the Iranian president’s Holocaust denial. The commentary focused on two arguments—the Holocaust wasn’t Iran’s issue, and rather than turning the table on Tehran’s enemies, Ahmadinejad’s statement would only make things worse for Iran.¹²

What was conspicuously absent from the internal debate in Tehran, however, was the ideological motivations and factors that Iran publicly invoked to justify its stance on Israel. Neither the honor of Islam nor the suffering of the Palestinian people figured in the deliberations. Rather, both the terms of the debate and its outcome were of a purely strategic nature. Both camps aimed at giving Iran the initiative in the confrontation with the United States and Israel to avoid suffering the fate of Iraq, where from 1991 until the 2003 invasion Washington remained largely in firm control of events. Though the regime didn’t reach a consensus on how to resolve the matter, all Iranian officials were forbidden by Ayatollah Khomeini to repeat the venomous Holocaust remarks for the time being—much to Ahmadinejad’s frustration.

That decision still holds. When Ahmadinejad visited New York to address the UN General Assembly in September 2006, Western journalists challenged him on the Holocaust issue. But rather than repeating his earlier

remarks, Ahmadinejad turned the question into a different debate: Whether the Palestinians should pay for the crimes of Nazi Germany, and why debating the Holocaust is a crime in some European states. "If this event happened, where did it happen?" Ahmadinejad asked CNN's Anderson Cooper. "The 'where' is the main question. And it wasn't in Palestine. [So] why is the Holocaust used as a pretext to occupy the Palestinian lands?" He then went on to call for more research into the topic as he completely avoided acknowledging the reality of the Holocaust or repeating his previous characterization of it as a myth.¹³ But even without repeating his earlier remarks, Ahmadinejad showed how easily he could undermine his moderate rivals in Tehran by infuriating Western audiences.

NUCLEAR AYATOLLAHS?

The standoff over Iran's nuclear program must also be addressed in this context. Just as the Israeli-Iranian enmity isn't driven by ideological differences between the two, neither is it solely caused by a sense of threat in Israel arising from Iran's nuclear activities. Certainly Israel has legitimate concerns about Iranian nuclear plans, but these worries cannot in and of themselves explain why Israeli-Iranian relations took a turn for the worse in 1992—three years after Israel discovered that Iran had restarted its nuclear program—nor why those concerns were temporarily put to rest by Netanyahu in 1996 when he tried to reach out to Iran. "Israel didn't really pay any attention to [the Iranian nuclear program] until the peace process," explained Keith Weissman of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).¹⁴ At that time, the program was at an embryonic stage. Iran didn't have any uranium centrifuges and it lacked much of the know-how to develop nuclear weapons—and it still does.

According to a comprehensive U.S. intelligence review, in 2005 Iran was about a decade away from manufacturing the key ingredient for a nuclear weapon.¹⁵ Furthermore, according to several Israeli decision-makers, the Labor Party exaggerated the Iranian threat for political reasons. Though a distant threat did exist, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin overplayed it to sell the land-for-peace formula to the Israeli public, a former adviser to Rabin explained.¹⁶ After all, Israel's behavior did not square with the idea that it faced an existential threat from Iran. If it did, one would expect Israel to explore all avenues to neutralize that threat, including a U.S.-Iran dialogue. Instead, Israel worked strenuously to prevent any such dialogue from taking place.

The Shah started Iran's nuclear program back in the 1970s. Iran pro-

duced more oil than it does today, and its domestic consumption was much lower in those days. Still, President Gerald Ford offered Tehran the chance to buy a U.S.-built reprocessing facility for extracting plutonium from nuclear reactor fuel. Through that offer, Iran would master the complete nuclear fuel cycle, which also would grant it the know-how to produce material for a nuclear bomb. But Washington wanted to go even further. In 1975, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger developed a negotiating strategy for the sale of nuclear energy equipment to Iran projected to bring American business more than \$6 billion in revenue. Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, and Donald Rumsfeld all held key national security posts in the Ford administration. More than a quarter century later, however, the same individuals were in the forefront of a campaign seeking to deny Iran access to that same technology, arguing that a country with Iran's oil wealth would seek the technology for military purposes only.¹⁷

Though Iran is still years away from having the capability and material to build a nuclear bomb, the standoff has reached a critical point because of Iran's efforts to master uranium enrichment. According to Israel, once Iran learns how to enrich uranium in large quantities and to high degrees, it will have passed a "point of no return." Iran will have acquired the necessary know-how, after which it will be next to impossible to stop Tehran from going nuclear. But there are many problems with this analysis. For one, Iran—unlike Israel—has signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and the majority of the parties to the treaty believe that Iran has a right to uranium enrichment under Article IV of the NPT, which guarantees all states "the inalienable right . . . to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination." Denying Iran that right would change the terms of the treaty, which many nuclear haves-nots are reluctant to go along with unless the nuclear-haves live up to their commitment under Article VI of the treaty and begin dismantling their nuclear arsenals.¹⁸ Second, according to some nonproliferation experts, the concept of a point of no return is an arbitrary measure used for political purposes. "The 'point of no return' concept is not a valid one, and the voices in America and in Israel using it to push for a quick solution are misleading," said Jon Wolfsthal, a former senior Energy Department official. "This is a made-up term by those who want immediate action."¹⁹

Immediate action is precisely what the Israelis have been calling for. "Every day that passes brings the Iranians closer to building a bomb," Israel's Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni said in the summer of 2006. "The world cannot afford a nuclear Iran."²⁰ The pro-Israel lobby in Washington took a

characteristically more hawkish position than the Israeli government itself. "The parallels of the geo-political climate of March 5, 1933, and that of March 5, 2006, are stunning in their likeness; eerie in their implication," AIPAC Executive Director Howard Kohr told five thousand AIPAC supporters at their annual banquet in Washington in March 2006. Before Kohr's speech, the audience was shown a series of video clips comparing Adolf Hitler's rise to power with Ahmadinejad's tenure as Iran's president.²¹ The Israelis have put a tremendous amount of pressure on the Bush administration to act. They played a key role in convincing Washington to adopt a zero-enrichment policy, meaning that Iran must be completely denied any enrichment technology. Even a small pilot-scale program would be unacceptable, because Iran could still learn how to master the technology from such a program, the Israelis maintained. Whenever the Bush administration hinted at warming up to a compromise, the Israelis sounded the alarm bells.

For instance, when the Bush administration expressed support for a proposal that would permit Iran to continue its nuclear development as long as enrichment took place in Russia, AIPAC came out strongly against the Bush administration.²² At a briefing on Capitol Hill, a senior Israeli diplomat was asked what kind of inspections regime would make the Israelis feel comfortable with an Iranian *civilian* nuclear program. Without hesitation the diplomat replied, "None." Instead, he explained, the only guarantee acceptable to Israel was "the debilitation of Iran's industrial base." If the United States doesn't take quick action on Iran, the Israelis said, the Jewish State "may have to go it alone," hinting that it might try to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities itself.

The prospect of an Israeli assault on Iran's nuclear installations created a major headache for the White House, because the United States would be automatically blamed for such action—regardless of whether President Bush had given the Israelis a green light or not. And since Israel itself does not have the military capability to successfully take out Iran's program through air strikes, the veiled threats coming out of Tel Aviv were likely aimed at pressuring Washington not to moderate its stance, by warning it about the consequences of an Israeli assault on Iran: a major escalation of the violence in the region that would pose a serious danger to U.S. security, given Washington's increasingly vulnerable position in Iraq. Whether it liked it or not, Washington would get sucked into the ensuing mess.

Ironically, Tehran might not be pursuing a nuclear weapon itself, but the capability to be able to go nuclear in case it faces an imminent threat.

(For Iran to possess such a capability, however, is still seen as a major problem by Western powers.) International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Executive Director Mohamed ElBaradei has suggested that Iran's preferred option is to have the capability to make weapons without having to do so. ElBaradei said the Iranians know that mastering uranium enrichment is "a deterrent" in and of itself and that "they don't need a weapon; [enrichment] sends a message." The IAEA director qualified his comments on the *News-Hour with Jim Lehrer* on March 18, 2004: "Well, what I mean is . . . if you have an enrichment program or a reprocessing program, which means that you can produce uranium . . . you are really sending a message that we know how to do it, should we decide to make a weapon. We don't need . . . to develop a weapon, but I am telling you—you know, the world, my neighbors, that I can do it."²³

The Iranians are well aware that a decision to weaponize would likely weaken rather than advance Iran's strategic position. As long as the Middle East is kept as free as possible from nuclear weapons, Iran will enjoy a conventional superiority vis-à-vis its neighbors because of its size and resources. However, if Iran weaponizes, it will risk sparking a nuclear arms race that may lead small states such as Bahrain and Kuwait to opt for a nuclear capability as well. In such a Middle East, Iran would lose its conventional superiority and find itself at strategic parity with states less than one-twentieth its size. This is partly why Iran joined with another populous regional state—Egypt—to keep the Middle East a nuclear-free zone back in the 1970s. As large states, Iran and Egypt would have the least to gain and the most to lose by going nuclear. As a small state, Israel would have the most to gain. (The Israelis disagree with this analysis and assume that Iran will seek to obtain a nuclear weapon no matter what.)²⁴

Furthermore, Tehran believes that it has effective deterrence capabilities against almost all states in the region, including Israel, and wouldn't need nuclear weapons to dissuade the Jewish State from attacking Iran. "From the government's perspective, weapons of mass destruction would not constitute a deterrence against Israel. We have other deterrents that work better," Iran's UN Ambassador Javad Zarif explained, hinting at Iran's asymmetric capabilities in Lebanon.²⁵ (The effectiveness of this deterrence was demonstrated during the Israeli-Hezbollah war in the summer of 2006.) The only threat against which Iran lacks an effective deterrence is the United States (though Iran does have a partial deterrent in the form of influence over Shia militias in Iraq, which could badly hurt the already-failing U.S. occupation there). But if relations with the United States could be

patched up, Iran could perhaps also be deprived of one of the key motivators for attaining nuclear weapons.

A DETERRABLE TEHRAN?

Israel's fear of a nuclear Iran is understandable, even though Israel does not believe that Iran would necessarily use the doomsday weapon against it.²⁶ That would surely lead to Iran's own destruction: Iranian civilian and military leaders are well aware of Israel's arsenal of two hundred nuclear warheads and its second-strike capability through its three nuclear-equipped Dolphin submarines. And contrary to the depiction of the Iranians as "mad mullahs," most strategic thinkers in Israel recognize that the Iranian government is extremist and radical—but rational.

In fact, Iran is a more potent adversary of Israel precisely because it is *not* irrational and careless. Iran has acted with greater savvy and caution than have many of Israel's traditional foes. Whereas Saddam was careless and adventurous, and committed strategic blunders by attacking Iran in 1980 and Kuwait in 1990, Tehran has operated according to completely different principles. Even under the most ideological days of the Iranian revolution, Iran was never reckless or completely insensitive to its losses.²⁷ "People here respect the Iranians and the Iranian regime. They take them as very serious, calculating players," said Ehud Yaari, a veteran Israeli television journalist.²⁸ Efraim Halevi, the former Mossad boss, concurred. "I don't think they are irrational, I think they are very rational. To label them as irrational is escaping from reality and it gives you kind of an escape clause," he said.²⁹ As long as the other side is rational, an Israeli deterrent capacity against an Iranian nuclear threat has a strong chance of succeeding precisely because the Iranians know the price of attacking Israel, according to Reuven Pedatzur, director of the Galili Center for Strategy and National Security and a fighter pilot in the Israeli Air Force reserves.³⁰

Iran's rationality may also be the reason why thus far it has not shared chemical or biological weapons with any of its Arab proxies such as Hezbollah, and why a nuclear Iran likely would not share nuclear weapons with terrorist groups. Israel has signaled Iran that it would retaliate against any nuclear attack on Israel by hitting Iran—regardless of who attacked Israel. Tehran has fully grasped the meaning of the signal—if any of Iran's proxies attacked Israel with a nuclear warhead, Israel would destroy Iran. But even without this stern warning, Iran would be unlikely to share the doomsday weapon with its proxies precisely because those groups would cease to be

proxies if they acquired such a powerful weapon. Iran's ambition, after all, is to become the region's undisputed power; given its tendency to view all other actors as potential competitors, it's hardly likely Tehran would undermine its goal by sharing the sensitive technology. Judging from Tehran's past behavior, the Iranian leadership is too Machiavellian to commit such an irrevocable and devastating mistake.

The minority view in Israel, dubbed the Beginist view, is advocated by people like Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Sneh, Knesset member Uzi Landau, and Gen. Amos Gilad. They argue that the preemptive doctrine of Menachem Begin—who destroyed Iraq's nuclear facility by bombing Osirak in 1981—must guide Israel's approach to Iran. The states in the Middle East are irrational and suicidal, according to this school of thought, and, as a result, no stable deterrent option is available.³¹ Israel cannot afford to take any risks with such enemies. The only viable defense is to ensure that these countries do not gain access to nuclear technology to begin with by preemptively destroying their nuclear facilities.

Advocates of this line often point to a statement made by Rafsanjani in early 2002, in which he discussed how Israel's smaller territory would make it more vulnerable to a nuclear attack, hinting—the Beginists say—that Iran believes it can win a nuclear war with Israel. (Rafsanjani later accused Israel of distorting his statement.)³² In the end, the Beginists have had a greater impact on Israel's rhetoric and portrayal of the conflict than on its actual policy regarding Iran. After all, if Iran is an irrational and suicidal state, then why hasn't it committed suicide yet? For the last twenty-seven years, the Islamic Republic seems to have declined every opportunity to destroy itself. In fact, the clerics in Tehran are probably more powerful now than ever before. Given the Iranian government's many internal problems and its unpopularity at home and abroad, it is difficult to see how the clerics could have achieved this success had they been irrational.

Nevertheless, it is not surprising that many in Israel have drawn the conclusion that Tehran is irrational because that is arguably what the clerics want Iran's enemies to believe. But behind their often contradictory behavior lies a single, carefully calculated policy. Iran uses this contradiction to conceal its interests and make itself appear irrational and unpredictable. It has been called "simulated irrationality."³³ "We should not be calculable and predictable to them [Iran's enemies]," Amir Mohebian, an influential conservative strategist, explained. "The U.S. could not mess with Imam [Khomeini] because he wasn't calculable. . . . Saddam's fall was because he

was calculable; they knew that even if he had weapons of mass destruction he would not dare use them."³⁴

This line of thinking is not limited to the conservative camp in Iran. According to an adviser to the Iranian National Security Advisor, it is rooted in Iran's experience during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when the country's openness enabled foreign powers to manipulate it in order to exploit its natural resources and render it dependent on the West. The Iranian government believes that "you have to maintain a calculated distance with foreigners," the adviser explained. "You don't let them understand how you're running your affairs. And that's why I think there is an intention out there to confuse. That is why they would let so many contradictory policies be aired by different institutions. That's fine. That buys [Iran] security [because] we know what we are doing."³⁵ Iran may have fooled many in Israel with this strategy, but it has also contributed to the enormous lack of trust between Iran and the outside world, which in turn has made it all the more difficult to find a solution to Iran's problems with the United States and the international community.

Whether Iran is rational or not, suicidal or not, or even if it is intent on attacking Israel or not, a nuclear Iran would still pose a problem for Israel because of its impact on Israel's strategic maneuverability. The real danger to Israel of a nuclear-capable Iran is twofold. First, an Iran that does not have nuclear weapons—but that can build them—will significantly damage Israel's ability to deter militant Palestinian and Lebanese organizations. It will damage the image of Israel as the sole nuclear-armed state in the region and undercut the myth of its invincibility. That image is "the most powerful stabilizer of the peace. It's our deterrence," Gilad told me. Such an Iranian deterrence capability would undermine Israel's military supremacy and prevent it from dictating the parameters of peace and pursuing unilateral peace plans. "We cannot afford a nuclear bomb in the hands of our enemies, period. They don't have to use it; the fact that they have it is enough," Sneh argued. "A nuclear Iran could force Israel to accept territorial compromises with its neighbors to deprive Tehran of points of hostility that it could use against the Jewish State. Israel simply would not be able to afford a nuclear rivalry with Iran and continued territorial disputes with the Arabs at the same time. Second, the deterrence and power Iran would gain by mastering the fuel cycle could compel Washington to cut a deal with Tehran in which Iran would be recognized as a regional power and gain strategic significance in the Middle East at the expense of Israel."

WASHINGTON'S OPTIONS: BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE

When it comes to Iran and the Israeli-Iranian rivalry, conventional wisdom says that Washington does not have any good options. But some are worse than others. Some are built on fancy theories that have little connection to reality, similar to Israel's insistence on remaining loyal to the periphery doctrine in the 1980s even after Khomeini had seized power in Iran. The Israelis' worldview was based on rather simplistic assumptions about the mechanisms of international relations that failed to take into account Iran's conflicting interests. On the one hand, Israel believed that the Arab-Israeli rift was so deep that no real peace with the Arabs was achievable (in spite of its agreement with Egypt at Camp David I); on the other hand, it assumed that Iran reasoned along the same lines that Israel did. Iran would always be at odds with its Arab neighbors because of the Arab-Persian rift, Israel assumed, making it a natural and long-lasting ally of Israel regardless of the wishes of the rulers of Tehran. Geostrategic realities would simply leave Tehran with no other options.³⁶ Based on these assumptions, a notion was formed about what Iran's behavior *should* be. When Iran's behavior did not conform to this notion, the validity of the assumptions underlying it wasn't questioned. Rather, Iran's behavior was deemed irrational and temporary. Sooner or later it would "come to its senses."

This same divorced-from-reality outlook has characterized the Bush administration's approach to the Middle East since September 11. One fantasy in which the Bush White House has invested much energy and hope is regime-change in Iran, which itself is based on the idea that with a different regime ruling Tehran, the problems between the United States and Iran, as well as Israel and Iran, would more or less automatically be resolved. "The moment the [Islamic] regime is gone, the [Israeli-Iranian] relationship will change 180 degrees," Sneh maintained.³⁷ Mindful of the close relationship Israel and the Shah enjoyed, it is easy to reach this dubious conclusion. But there is much disagreement in Israel about this point. Some, like Menashe Amir, the legendary director of Radio Israel's Persian service, see the religious zeal of the Iranian leadership as the sole cause of the enmity. "Today, Iran is against Israel due to religious reasons," he told me in his Jerusalem office, which is decorated with Iranian artifacts and paintings. "Future Iranian regimes won't have that problem."³⁸

Others argue that a change in individual leadership or regime in Tehran would not affect Iran's nuclear drive. A secular and democratic government

in Tehran may actually be more inclined to acquire a nuclear bomb, Ariel Sharon's spokesperson Ranaan Gissin maintained, or, at a minimum, it will be under popular pressure to continue the program at the same pace.³⁹ Israel "cannot be confident that reform in Iran will eliminate the strategic threat to Israel," said Uzi Arad, former director of intelligence for the Mossad and currently a professor at the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya.⁴⁰ Moreover, there is no guarantee that a democratic Iran would be any more stable or any less radical than the current regime. "If a change in the regime is possible, then the threat is there. It will be an unstable situation and continue to be an unstable regime," Israel's Gen. Amnon Lipkin-Shahak explained. Just as the Shah's regime was replaced by a radical government, a weak democratic regime in Iran could face the same fate.⁴¹ Gilad, in turn, dismissed the entire discussion as useless and academic because, in his view, the regime in Iran isn't likely to fall. "I exclude any possibility for regime change," he asserted.⁴² As problematic as the ayatollahs have been, the nature of the clerical regime is not the root of the Israeli-Iranian or the U.S.-Iranian enmity. After all, it was geopolitical changes that sparked the Israeli-Iranian rivalry after the end of the Cold War, not the ideology or nature of Iran's leadership. Just as the Islamic Revolution did not end Iran's quest for primacy (in fact, it initially intensified it), there is little to suggest that a secular Iran would be less inclined to seek preeminence and more prone to accept a timid role in regional affairs.

THE FAILURE OF CONTAINMENT—THE LEBANON WAR OF 2006

Another failed policy is containment—the idea that the solution to the conflict lies in containing and weakening Iran. This policy has not only failed, it has backfired and made a bad situation worse by making Iran stronger—and angrier. The last attempt to weaken Iran—the 2006 summer war in Lebanon—exemplifies this point. Though Israel did not expect the July 12 Hezbollah border attack and kidnapping of its soldiers, the Jewish State had planned and prepared for war against Hezbollah for more than two years. In 2005, a senior Israeli army officer began giving off-the-record PowerPoint presentations to American diplomats, journalists, and think tanks, setting out in frightening detail the plan for the expected operation. "Of all of Israel's wars since 1948, this was the one for which Israel was most prepared," Professor Gerald Steinberg of Bar Ilan University explained.⁴³ At first, everything went as planned. As Washington gave Israel's war its blessing and support—Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice referred to the fighting as the "birth pangs of a new Middle East"—Israel Defense Forces Chief of

Staff Dan Halutz and a crowd of officers gathered hundreds of feet below-ground in the command bunker of the Israeli Air Force in Tel Aviv to monitor the developments. Late on the night of July 12, the first reports came in. Fifty-four missile launchers had been destroyed by Israel's jet fighters, which were returning to base. Relieved, Halutz called Prime Minister Ehud Olmert at his residence in Jerusalem. "All the long-range rockets have been destroyed," Halutz proudly declared. But he didn't stop there. After a short pause, he added: "We've won the war."⁴⁴

In the meantime, as neoconservatives in Washington were urging the Bush administration not only to support the war but to join it as well, decision-makers in Tehran were trembling. Both Hezbollah and Iran were surprised by the scale of Israel's response to the raid. "We expected Israel's response to the taking hostage of the two soldiers to be at most a day or two of shelling or a few limited attacks of specific places," the deputy secretary general of Hezbollah, Sheikh Naim Kassem, later told reporters.⁴⁵ Iranian intelligence had warned Tehran's political leaders that Israel had plans to attack Lebanon later, in October 2006, but they had no indication that the scale of the war would be this large or that it would begin as early as July.⁴⁶ "This was God's gift to Israel," Nasser Hadian, a reformist strategist, said. "Hezbollah gave them the golden opportunity to attack."⁴⁷

The Iranian fear was that Washington and Israel were paving the way for a military confrontation with Iran by first taking out Hezbollah—Iran's first line of defense. This was more than a proxy war, Tehran feared; it was the prelude to a final showdown. Pundits in the United States speculated that Iran had triggered the conflict to take attention away from the Iranian nuclear standoff, but in Tehran the feeling was that "one of Iran's cards had been unnecessarily wasted" by Hezbollah's foolish attack against Israel. The conventional wisdom in Tehran was that a direct confrontation between the Lebanese militants and the Israeli army would likely work to Hezbollah's disadvantage.⁴⁸ "Israel and the U.S. knew that as long as Hamas and Hezbollah were there, confronting Iran would be costly," Mohsen Rezai, Secretary of the Expediency Discernment Council of Iran, told the Iranian newspaper *Baztab*. "So, to deal with Iran, they first want to eliminate forces close to Iran that are in Lebanon and Palestine."⁴⁹ On this point, the Israelis and Iranians didn't seem to disagree. For years, the Israelis had been worried about Hezbollah's military buildup; with its deployment of thousands of missiles and rockets, the Shia guerrilla group could hit large parts of northern Israel. Through Hezbollah, the Iranians were gaining a deterrent capability and leverage that was unacceptable to Israel. In the minds of the Is-

raelis, the fighting in Lebanon was not just about Hezbollah; it was also about Iran. "To some degree, one of the aims of this war is to make sure in Tehran, when they look at the pictures of Beirut, they also think about Tehran," Steinberg told the Council on Foreign Relations in an interview.⁵⁰

But neither Israel's hopes, nor Tehran's fears, came true. After some initial successes, the Israelis were stunned at Hezbollah's powerful response, including its firing of thousands of Katyusha rockets into northern Israel. Rather than facing an amateur militia, the Israelis soon realized that they were fighting a well-trained and well-equipped guerilla army. Hezbollah even used a Chinese-made C-807 missile against an Israeli warship off Lebanon's coast, catching the Israelis off guard and disabling the ship. Israeli intelligence had failed to fully discover before the war what Hezbollah was hiding in its arsenals.⁵¹ The Lebanese fought a high-tech war, and they paid as much attention to the media battle as they did to the fighting on the ground. Trained and equipped by the Iranians, Hezbollah fighters cracked the codes of Israeli radio communications, intercepting reports on the casualties they had inflicted. Whenever an Israeli soldier was killed, Hezbollah confirmed it by listening to the Israeli radio and then sent the reports immediately to its satellite TV station, Al-Manar, which broadcast the news live. Thus Arab audiences knew the names of Israeli casualties and where they had been killed well before the Israeli army had a chance to inform the soldiers' families. The psychological impact of this on the Israelis—who had grown accustomed to superiority over the armies of their Arab neighbors—was devastating.

As the war progressed, Israeli tactical miscalculations and strategic shortsightedness changed the situation on the ground—as well as public opinion in Israel. At the outset, the vast majority of the Israeli public supported the war. It was seen as a defensive and necessary war to finally put an end to Hezbollah's border attacks. However, the initial euphoria of the Israeli leadership—and the Israeli public—soon turned to despair. After a few weeks of hard fighting with no clear gains for the Israel Defense Forces, polls showed that 63 percent of Israelis believed that Olmert should resign. And 74 percent wanted the inexperienced Moroccan-born defense minister, Amir Perez, to step down as well.⁵² The battle cry that at the beginning of the war read "Let Israel win!" had by the third week turned into "We will settle for a draw." By the end of the war, after thirty-four days, Israelis half-jokingly said that what was important wasn't whether Israel had won or lost, but that it had played the game. Rather than strengthening and reinforcing the image of Israel's invincible deterrence, the war that was to

weaken Iran only made Israel itself more vulnerable. Even though Hezbollah took a beating (as did Lebanon in general; the more than one thousand casualties overwhelmingly were civilians, and the country's infrastructure was systematically bombed by Israel from the first days of the war), its strategic capability wasn't significantly damaged, and its political strength within the complicated Lebanese sectarian mix may have been enhanced. Israel was under just as much threat after the war as before.

Even the Iranians were surprised by the outcome—and by Hezbollah's fighting power. The fear, and to some extent the expectation, had been that Israel would destroy Iran's Lebanese ally, after which "the entire regional calculus would change in Iran's disfavor."⁵³ Instead, Iran's—and even more so Hezbollah's—stock in the Arab street rose to unprecedented levels, Israel and the United States were weakened, and pro-Western Arab governments found themselves squeezed between their disgruntled populations and a White House that showed little consideration for the interests and wishes of its allies. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan, three key U.S. allies whose regimes would have much to lose from Iran's rise, took the unusual step in the early days of the war of chastising Hezbollah for having started the war. Never before had an Arab government so publicly denounced an Arab group fighting Israel.⁵⁴ The Saudi calculation was that, by offering political coverage for other countries to condemn Hezbollah, America would rein in the Israelis. But the Saudi move backfired. The Bush administration worked to prolong the war rather than shorten it, embarrassing the Saudi leadership by revealing its lack of influence over the Bush White House.⁵⁵ At the same time, popular support for Hezbollah was so strong in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt that their leaders were quickly forced to change their anti-Hezbollah line. To add insult to injury, not only did Israel's move strengthen Iran, it benefited further from Washington's weakening of Iran's Arab rivals.

Containment has also failed even when circumstances were far more favorable for the United States. Washington and Tel Aviv currently face a radically different situation compared to 1993, when containment was first put in place through the peace process. At that time Washington stood at the apex of its power. The Soviet Union had collapsed, and, in the "New World Order" that was forming, the United States was the world's sole superpower. Diplomatically, Washington's stock was equally high. Then-Secretary of State James Baker had marshaled a broad coalition—including numerous Arab states—to expel Saddam Hussein from Kuwait, and he had kept his word that Arab cooperation against Iraq would lead to a push for Israeli-

Palestinian peacemaking. Iran, on the other hand, was weak. It was still recuperating from the Iraq-Iran war, and its relations with the Arab states and Europe remained frosty. Still, isolating Iran proved far more difficult than Washington had envisioned. Despite its extensive efforts, the policy of containing Iran proved a huge failure.

Today, the tables have turned. Washington's credibility is at an all-time low. The invasion and occupation of Iraq has weakened the United States both militarily and diplomatically. Israel's war with Hezbollah has done little to buy it new friends in the Arab world, and the pro-Western Arab governments' impotence in influencing Washington has increased the rift between these regimes and their peoples. In spite of their undeniable economic successes, the Arab states of the Persian Gulf are weakened, because their security is directly tied to the strength of the United States.

Iran, on the other hand, has gained strength. The Bush administration has expedited Iran's emergence as a key power in the Middle East by swiping its immediate rivals—Afghanistan's Taliban and Iraq's Saddam Hussein—off the geopolitical chessboard. No regional power can balance and contain Iran without extensive U.S. support—and as the cost of this policy increases, its sustainability becomes questionable. Sooner or later, containment will break down and the United States will be forced to either integrate or confront Iran. Increasingly Washington's—and Israel's—best option seems to be to bite the bullet and find some accommodation with Tehran, because the cost of not talking to Iran is steadily increasing. Opportunities to negotiate with Iran from a position of strength in the last five years have all been squandered by the neoconservatives, who, like Israel, did not want any U.S.-Iran talks at all. As a result, future talks may have to start from a point that is more favorable to Tehran than to Washington and Tel Aviv.

THE NONEXISTENT MILITARY SOLUTION

Military action against Iran would be extremely risky, and even if it were to succeed the costs would be staggering. Top officers in the U.S. Army and Marine Corps, as well as many conservatives in the U.S. national security elite, warn that a U.S. attack on Iran would be potentially catastrophic for the U.S. position in Iraq and the region generally, given Iran's asymmetric counterstrike capabilities. Israel, on the other hand, cannot take on Iran by itself. The Israeli Air Force still lacks the capability to take out all of Iran's known nuclear facilities. Unlike the Iraqi program, Iran's nuclear facilities are spread throughout the country. In addition, the distance to Iran is far greater, and the Israelis cannot reach Iran without air refueling. More im-

portantly, U.S. war plans involve targeting not only the nuclear plants but also much of the infrastructure related to the nuclear program. The United States is able to destroy these points, but Israel is not. A rash and unsuccessful military campaign could turn the political momentum in Iran's favor and undermine efforts to stop Tehran. Furthermore, with approximately twenty-five thousand Iranian Jews still living in Iran, military confrontation could jeopardize the security of this ancient community, a move the Jewish State would be reluctant to take. And even though Israel has lobbied the United States to deal with Iran in a decisive manner, pro-Israeli groups in Washington are wary of pushing the United States too hard, lest they be seen by the American public as pressing America to go to war for Israel's sake. Jewish organizations in the United States have already quietly asked the White House not to cite Israel's security as a top rationale for a possible showdown with Iran, fearing a backlash from the American public.⁵⁶

A POSSIBLE WAY OUT—REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND COLLECTIVE SECURITY

The one policy that hasn't been seriously pursued is regional integration through dialogue and engagement. This policy would be based on the recognition that, like China, Iran is a country that the United States cannot contain indefinitely, that Iran becomes more antagonistic when excluded, and that the United States can better influence Iran by helping it integrate into the world's political and economic structure rather than by keeping it out. This approach is also favored by leading Iranian human rights activists, who believe it will facilitate internal political reform as well. And what the Iranians are asking for is, in essence, an end to a policy that has cost the United States a lot and won it little.

Beyond being the least costly policy option, there are indications that the policy has a fair chance of succeeding. Both imperial and Islamic Iran have had ingrained in them the notion that Iran's size, population, educational level, and natural resources have made the country destined to obtain regional preeminence and that it should play a leadership role reflective of its geopolitical weight. This has been—and continues to be—the main driving force of Iranian foreign policy both during the era of the Shah and after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Revolutionary Iran initially aspired to be the leader of the entire Islamic world. The Shah's aspirations for Iran's role far exceeded the Middle East geographically; he dreamed of establishing Iran as the preeminent naval power in the Indian Ocean basin.

However, since the end of the Iraq-Iran war Tehran has gradually re-

duced its aspirations and the definition of its national security environment to encompass only the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea and not the greater Middle East.⁵⁷ Within this area Iran wants to be second to none, and its foreign policy has radicalized when regional or outside powers have sought to isolate and contain it. According to Murad Saghafi, a secular reformist with close family ties to the late Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran would accept a U.S. rapprochement that safeguarded Iran's regional interests. "If they say, Iran has a place in the world, we don't want to attack Iran, let's make Iran a leading gas producer, [Iran] will say yes," Saghafi said.⁵⁸

But even though revolutionary Iran hasn't hesitated to sacrifice its ideological objectives for the sake of state and regime survival, are there any guarantees that it would become more pragmatic once it could pursue its ideological objectives without sacrificing its strategic position? Would ideology continue to be a secondary motivator of its foreign policy, or would it come to the forefront? In short, would a more powerful Iran also be a more radical Iran? It is impossible to make such predictions with complete accuracy. But a review of Iran's past behavior indicates that a more powerful and integrated Iran is also a more moderate Iran. Its behavior after Likud's victory in 1996 is a case in point. As Iran's power rose and it improved its relations with the Arab states, the EU, and the Organization of Islamic Conferences and successfully countered American efforts to isolate it, its position on the Israeli-Palestinian issue tempered. Iran did not use its rising power to intensify its anti-Israel policies. Iran may have realized that it couldn't exclude Israel from regional decision-making (just as Israel failed to exclude Iran) and that in the long run it did not need to isolate Israel in order to achieve its leadership objectives.

A new U.S. approach could turn its Iran foreign policy into a force for stability by accommodating legitimate Iranian security objectives in return for Iranian concessions on various regional and international issues, as well as significant Iranian policy modifications, including Iran's acceptance of U.S. global leadership and an end to its hostilities against Israel. As Iran itself had suggested in its 2003 proposal to Washington, Tehran would have to accept Israel as a fact in the region and respect a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. Joschka Fischer, Germany's former foreign minister, urged the United States to adopt this approach in an opinion piece in the *Washington Post* in May 2006. "Iran's alternatives should be no less than recognition and security or total isolation," he wrote.⁵⁹ Such an order would better reflect the region's natural balance, which in turn would make it more stable and less costly to sustain for the United States.

This idea also enjoys support in Israel among moderate elements, who recognize that a winner-take-all approach will in the long run probably leave Israel in a weaker position. Ben-Ami, Israel's former foreign minister, argued in the pages of *Haaretz* that "the question today is not when Iran will have nuclear power, but how to integrate it into a policy of regional stability before it obtains such power. Iran is not driven by an obsession to destroy Israel, but by its determination to preserve its regime and establish itself as a strategic regional power, vis-à-vis both Israel and the Sunni Arab states. . . . The answer to the Iranian threat is a policy of detente, which would change the Iranian elite's pattern of conduct."⁶⁰ Ben-Ami went on to point out that this is first and foremost an American responsibility, but that the Bush administration—like Israel—has been more interested in fighting "evil" than in pursuing conflict resolution. A U.S.-Iran dialogue is absolutely necessary, Ben-Ami argued, even though it would lead to serious compromises for Washington and Tel Aviv, such as recognizing Iran's regional importance. Unlike his predecessors in the Labor Party, Ben-Ami pointed out that alleviating the Iranian threat would aid the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, and that seeking to exaggerate the threat to scare the Arabs and the Israeli public to the negotiating table would be damaging to Israel in the long run.

What Ben-Ami put forward is that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict cannot be resolved unless the geopolitical context in which it transpires is addressed. Many have argued that the Israeli-Palestinian issue is the key to resolving all problems in the Middle East. Colin Powell, for instance, believed that Israel-Palestine peace would pave the way for an accommodation with Iran. The key, however, may lie in the other direction. Though the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians touches everyone and everything in the region in a profoundly emotional way, it is not a conflict that sets the geopolitical balance. Neither is it driven by geopolitical factors. Rather, it is the geopolitical *imbalance* in the region that renders that conflict all the more unsolvable. Unless the underlying conflicts in the region are addressed, any process seeking to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian dispute will be hostage to geopolitical rivalries. It will be a pawn in the competition between Israel and Iran for the future order of the region, as it was in the mid-1990s. These issues are clearly linked, whether they are treated as such or not.

Though only Washington can lead the process of reintegrating Iran into the regional order, significant steps are also needed from Israel to make this policy successful. Thoroughly convinced that its Arab neighbors would destroy Israel if they could, the Jewish State seeks survival through military domination.⁶¹ The Israelis hold on to a concept referred to as their strate-

gic, or military, edge. The hostile intentions of its neighbors are immutable, the Israeli leadership has generally believed, making it discount the impact that its actions have on their objectives.⁶² And because of Israel's smaller population and geographic size, the standard doctrine holds, it has no choice but to seek to be stronger than its neighbors at all times, because "if any one of our enemies has the capability to eliminate us, they will," as Shmuel Bar, a veteran of the Israeli intelligence community, put it.⁶³ Most Israelis dismiss the idea that Israel can affect Iran's objectives and motives. "They are dedicated to their dreams, and their dream is to destroy Israel. . . . Nothing will change their mind. They are only flexible about the timetable," Israel's Gen. Gilad maintained.⁶⁴ If intentions are immutable, then Israel has no choice but to ensure the weakness of its neighbors. As long as Israel's neighbors are kept weak, their intentions will be irrelevant. "In this region, we have to consider every weapon as if it is directed toward Israel," Deputy Defense Minister Sneh argued. "This is the assumption that should lead us in everything that we are doing. We are living in a dangerous, unstable region, and we have to live according to worst-case scenarios all the time."⁶⁵

The emphasis on worst-case scenarios is, to a great degree, a result of overcompensation by the intelligence apparatus for the mistake Israel committed on the eve of the 1973 Yom Kippur war, when it grossly underestimated Arab capabilities while overstating its own abilities. The result was that a complacent Israel was stunned by a well-coordinated Egyptian and Syrian surprise attack that inflicted enormous Israeli losses in the first days of the war, nearly leading to a catastrophic defeat, before Israel regained its balance and went on the offensive. "The correction to this is an overcorrection, by far. Today, the prevailing culture, or I would say the mindset of the intelligence . . . is to attribute to the enemy almost infinite power and completely underestimate what our strength means to them," said Shmuel Limone of the Ministry of Defense.⁶⁶ This doomsday mindset tends to lead to self-fulfilling prophecies, materializing the worst-case scenarios rather than preventing them from arising.⁶⁷ In addition, the emphasis on hostile propaganda from Israel's foes, which in the case of Iran is abundant, tends to make Israel either miss positive signals or dismiss them as deception tactics.⁶⁸ Taken to the next step, the policy dictates that Israel take preemptive action against any state or organization that is about to acquire capabilities that could give it parity. According to David Ivry, former Israeli ambassador to the United States, preemption is an old Israeli policy. "Our tradition states, 'He who arises to kill you, arise earlier and kill him first.' The phrase 'arise earlier' contains the entire doctrine."⁶⁹

In April 2004 Prime Minister Ariel Sharon received a comprehensive national security report—Project Daniel—which argued that Israel has an inherent right to preemption because, it concluded, Arab and Iranian leaders are irrational and do not value self-preservation. This undermines the effectiveness of Israel's deterrence and necessitates complete Israeli military domination and the avoidance of parity at all cost. In this view, anything less than overwhelming Israeli superiority will constitute an existential threat to the Jewish State.⁷⁰ As a result, Israel must constantly seek to outgun its neighbors by preempting any would-be challengers. As the countries of the region progress, Israel must outrace them. It cannot afford to lose its lead, because if the neighbors gain the military upper hand they will destroy Israel. This doctrine shows why democratization in Iran may be insufficient to fundamentally change the Israeli-Iranian rivalry. Even a democratic Iran would be considered a threat to Israel if it could challenge Israel's military superiority—nuclear or conventional.⁷¹ "It's become the only way we believe we can firmly establish a presence in the region. In a sense it is a form of domination," an Israeli analyst admitted. "But it's not hegemonic. We do not want to be or think we can be the dominant cultural force. It is existence through domination." But it's domination nevertheless.

While integration remains the only policy that can stabilize the region, it cannot succeed unless the Israeli-Iranian rivalry is tamed, which in turn requires significant changes in both Iranian and Israeli foreign and security policies. At a minimum, Iran must accept the two-state solution and reduce its regional ambitions by settling for a role that doesn't outstrip its resources. Clearly, Iran cannot expect to gain a prominent role as a rightful force for stability in the region if it continues to view asymmetric military capabilities as a legitimate political tool. Israel, on the other hand, must amend its military outlook because its belief that it must dominate the region militarily will likely put it on a collision course with Tehran regardless of Iran's ideology, political structure, or policies. Relinquishing this military doctrine will likely also facilitate peacemaking between Israel and its Arab neighbors.

The clash between Iran's regional ambitions and Israel's insistence on strategic dominance will continue to fuel instability and undermine Washington's interests in the region unless America recognizes that neither stability nor democracy can be achieved without ending the balancing game and genuinely seeking a Middle East that integrates the legitimate aspirations of all states, including Iran. So far, the Bush administration has remained steadfast in resisting such a shift. Somewhere along the way, America became so weakened by the failure in Iraq that the Israeli-Iranian rivalry

was overshadowed by Washington's own fears that Iran would successfully challenge America's regional domination. In his State of the Union address on January 10, 2007, Bush accused Iran of destabilizing Iraq and supporting Shia militias killing American soldiers there, while neglecting the fact that Sunni insurgents—supported by elements in Jordan and Saudi Arabia—were responsible for more than 90 percent of American casualties in Iraq. Desperate to hold on to America's regional hegemony, Bush signaled that Iran would be confronted and isolated even more aggressively by the United States through the creation of an anti-Iran alliance consisting of Arab states and Israel; that is, balance-of-power politics would continue to guide America. But even if Washington were to stabilize Iraq and salvage U.S. hegemony in the Middle East, the balancing game would ensure that the eight-hundred-pound gorilla—the Israeli-Iranian rivalry—would continue to remain unaddressed and hidden behind slogans of democracy and freedom, while rendering stability and security in the Middle East an ever so hopeless dream.

CHAPTER 1 Introduction

Epigraphs: "Ahmadinejad Says Iran Ready for 'Final Nuclear Step,'" AFP, November 16, 2006; Victor Ostrovsky, *By Way of Deception* (New York: St. Martin's, 1990), 330; Samuel Segev, *The Iranian Triangle* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 249.

- 1 Ahmadinejad's statement has generally been mistranslated to read, "Wipe Israel off the map." Ahmadinejad never used the word "Israel" but rather the "occupying regime of Jerusalem," which is a reference to the Israeli regime and not necessarily to the country. Moreover, the hard-line Iranian president misquoted Ayatollah Khomeini in his speech. The father of the Iranian revolution had used the phrase "Sahneh roozgar," which means "scene of time," though for years the term was incorrectly translated by the Iranian government to mean "map." Ahmadinejad, however, said "Safheh roozgar," which means "pages of time," or "pages of history." No one noticed the change, and news agencies stuck with the standard—but incorrect—translation. The significant issue is that both phrases refer to time rather than place, making it incorrect to translate it as "wiping Israel off the map." As a result, Ahmadinejad "was not threatening an Iranian-initiated war to remove Israeli control over Jerusalem" but was rather "expressing a vague wish for the future," according to Jonathan Steele of the *Guardian*. See Jonathan Steele, "Lost in Translation," *Guardian*, June 14, 2006; and Ethan Bronner and Nazila Fathi, "Just How Far Did They Go, Those Words Against Israel?" *New York Times*, June 11, 2006.
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- 3 Seymour M. Hersh, "The Iran Plans," *New Yorker*, April 17, 2006. The White House denied the allegations made in the story.
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- 5 In 1979 Iran's Jewish community numbered approximately eighty thousand.
- 6 Norman Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos, and the World to Come* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).
- 7 Paul Kriwaczek, *In Search of Zarathustra* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), 184–185. The henotheistic nature of pre-exilic Judaism is exemplified in the First Commandment, "I am the Lord your God; you shall have no other gods before me."
- 8 Larry Derfner, "See No Evil, Hear No Evil," *Jerusalem Post*, September 28, 2006.
- 9 Barbara Demick, "Iran: Life of Jews Living in Iran," Sephardic Studies, <http://www.sephardicstudies.org/iran.html>.
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- 12 Sadeq Saba, "Iran Jews Express Holocaust Shock," BBC, February 11, 2006.
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- 14 "Iranian Jews Shaping Israeli Policy," *Jane's Islamic Analysis*, October 1, 2006.
- 15 Orly Halpern, "Cramped in Ashdod, Cheering for Iran," *Jerusalem Post*, June 11, 2006. Orly Halpern, "Immigrant Moves Back 'Home' to Teheran," *Jerusalem Post*, November 3, 2006.
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- 18 Interview with Ehud Yaari, Jerusalem, October 24, 2004.
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CHAPTER 2. An Alliance of Necessity.

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- 2 Resolution 181 was adopted by a vote of thirty-three to thirteen, with ten abstentions. Both the United States and the Soviet Union supported it.
- 3 R. K. Ramazani, "Iran and the Arab-Israeli Conflict," *Middle East Journal* 3 (1978): 414-415.
- 4 Sohrab Sobhani, *The Pragmatic Entente: Israeli-Iranian Relations, 1948-1988* (New York: Praeger, 1989), 23. (Mohammad Mossadeq had been elected Iran's prime minister in 1951 by a vote of seventy-nine to twelve by the Iranian parliament. The landslide victory left the Shah with no other option but to assent to the Parliament's vote, in spite of his differences with the charismatic Mossadeq. The Iranian prime minister was later overthrown by a coup organized by the CIA and the British intelligence, strengthening the Shah's grip on power.)
- 5 *Ibid.*, 3, 34.
- 6 Robert Reppa, *Israel and Iran—Bilateral Relationships and Effect on the Indian Ocean Basin* (New York: Praeger, 1974), 91.

- 7 Ramazani, "Iran and the Arab-Israeli Conflict," 415.
- 8 "Nasserism," which maintained that the West sought the suppression of the Arab masses and that the Arab-Israeli conflict was an instrument for Western intrusion in the Middle East, had become a powerful force in the Middle East by advocating anti-Colonialism and pan-Arab socialism.
- 9 Sobhani, *Pragmatic Entente*, 18.
- 10 Interview with former Iranian intelligence officer, Washington, D.C., March 14, 2004.
- 11 Phone interview with Ambassador Fereydoon Hoveyda, former head of the Permanent Mission of Iran to the UN, Washington, D.C., March 3, 2004. Samuel Segev, *The Iranian Triangle* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 62. In the early 1970s, the Shah offered Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) head Yassir Arafat a more pro-Arab position on Israel in return for an end to the PLO's support for the Iranian opposition. Later in the 1960s, the support of Arafat and the PLO—a major flag-bearer of pan-Arabism—for Iranian opposition and separatist groups further fueled Iranian opposition to pan-Arabism. The PLO opened its training camps to Iranian opposition elements that waged a military campaign against the Shah's regime, in hope that a change of regime in Tehran would bring Iran into the pro-Arab camp. (Interview with former Iranian diplomat under the Shah, Washington, D.C., April 2, 2004.)
- 12 Segev, *Iranian Triangle*, 35-36.
- 13 In 1954 Sultan Sanandaji, a low-level Iranian diplomat at the Iranian embassy in London, had approached an Israeli diplomat at the Israeli embassy in London, First Secretary Mordechai Gazit, and offered Israel access to Iranian energy sources. Sanandaji's proposal quickly led to a diplomatic frenzy involving the highest levels of government in both Iran and Israel. Later that year, Yisrael Koslov, a representative of Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, finalized the deal during a secret visit to Tehran. Segev, *Iranian Triangle*, 40.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 60-61, 39-41. A second pipeline from Eilat to Israel's Mediterranean port of Ashkelon was constructed after the 1967 war, during which the Suez Canal was closed down yet again. The Eilat-Ashkelon pipeline provided Israel with a steady supply of oil for its refineries and its growing domestic consumption. Its capacity was around 400,000 barrels per day in 1970, with plans of increasing it to 1.2 million barrels per day by 1980. Declassified Memorandum of Conversation between Pete Wolgast of Esso and Warren Clark of the U.S. Department of State, October 8, 1970. This document and the other government documents referenced here are available at the National Security Archives.
- 15 Declassified correspondence between Foggy Bottom and U.S. embassy in Tehran, February 13, 1969.
- 16 Interview with Deputy Minister M. Vakilzadeh, Washington, D.C., February 28, 2004.
- 17 Interview with former Iranian Minister of Agriculture A. A. Ahmadi, and his deputy, M. Vakilzadeh, Washington, D.C., February 28, 2004.
- 18 Gary Sick, *October Surprise* (New York: Random House, 1991), 60.
- 19 Sobhani, *Pragmatic Entente*, xviii-xxii.
- 20 Ramazani, "Iran and the Arab-Israeli Conflict," 416.
- 21 Interview with Charles Naas, former U.S. deputy ambassador to Iran in the 1970s, Washington, D.C., March 8, 2004.
- 22 Interview with Naas, March 8, 2004.

- 23 Sobhani, *Pragmatic Entente*, 128.
- 24 Interview with Gholam-Reza Afkhami, an advisor to the Mohammad Reza Shah, Washington, D.C., March 5, 2004.
- 25 Sobhani, *Pragmatic Entente*, 109.
- 26 Ramazani, "Iran and the Arab-Israeli Conflict," 427.
- 27 Sobhani, *Pragmatic Entente*, 27.
- 28 Nader Entessar, "Israel and Iran's National Security," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 4 (2004): 1–2; Segev, *Iranian Triangle*, 43.
- 29 Interview with former Iranian ambassador under the Shah, Washington, D.C., April 2, 2004. These accusations were categorically denied by Eliezer Tsafir, who served as the head of the Mossad in Iran and Iraq in the 1960s and 1970s. Interview, Tel Aviv, October 16, 2004.
- 30 Interview with former Iranian intelligence officer, Washington, D.C., March 14, 2004.
- 31 Interview with former Iranian diplomat stationed in Israel, Tehran, August 12, 2004.
- 32 Declassified telegram from the U.S. embassy in Tel Aviv, December 7, 1970.
- 33 Sick, *October Surprise*, 61.
- 34 Behrouz Souresrafi, *Khomeini and Israel* (London: Researchers, 1988), 32.
- 35 Sobhani, *Pragmatic Entente*, 114; Segev, *Iranian Triangle*, 42.
- 36 Interview with former Iranian ambassador, Washington, D.C., April 2, 2004.
- 37 Interview with former senior Israeli diplomat stationed in Tehran, Tel Aviv, October 31, 2004.
- 38 Declassified Memorandum of Conversation, U.S. embassy in Tehran, Andrew Killgore, Political Counselor, October 14, 1972.
- 39 R. K. Ramazani, *Iran's Foreign Policy 1941–1973* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1975), 404.
- 40 Seyed Assadollah Athari, "Iranian-Egyptian Relations," *Discourse: An Iranian Quarterly* 2 (2001): 51.
- 41 Ramazani, *Iran's Foreign Policy*, 321. When, as part of the resolution of the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, the Soviet Union ceased its propaganda attacks on Iran in return for an Iranian pledge not to permit U.S. missile bases on its soil, Cairo's role in confronting and provoking Iran grew. Using the Shah's relations with Israel as a pretext, Nasser challenged Iran's role in the region, depicted Iran as an oppressor of Arab peoples, and accused Tehran of seeking to colonize Arab lands—the same charges Egypt leveled against Israel. Ramazani, "Iran and the Arab-Israeli Conflict," 416.
- 42 Interview with former Iranian intelligence officer, Washington, D.C., March 14, 2004.
- 43 Ibid. The intelligence sharing also included assessments of developments in the Arab world, though the Iranians often mistrusted the Israeli intelligence and suspected that the Israelis shared only intelligence of poorer quality. Interview with former Iranian diplomat stationed in Israel, Tehran, August 12, 2004.

CHAPTER 3 Rise of Israel, Rise of Iran

Epigraph: Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography* (New York: Touchstone, 1992), 563.

- 1 Interview with former Iranian Ambassador to Denmark and Greece, Washington, D.C., April 2, 2004.
- 2 Interview with Charles Naas, Washington, D.C., March 8, 2004.

- 3 Interview with former Iranian deputy UN Ambassador Mehdi Ehsassi, Tehran, August 3, 2004.
- 4 Interview with Alinaghi Alikhani, former minister of finance under the Shah, Washington, D.C., April 7, 2004.
- 5 Samuel Segev, *The Iranian Triangle* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 70.
- 6 *Borba* (Yugoslavia), November 1967.
- 7 Declassified memorandum from State Department official and the chargé d'affaires at the U.S. embassy in Tehran, November 10, 1970.
- 8 Conversation on April 27, 1971, between Iran's top diplomat in Tel Aviv and a political officer at the U.S. embassy. The conversation is summarized in a confidential memo found in the U.S. embassy in Tehran during the 1979–1981 hostage crisis. The memo was subsequently published by Iran's revolutionary government. It is available at the National Security Archive in Washington, D.C.
- 9 Seyed Assadollah Athari, "Iranian-Egyptian Relations," *Discourse: An Iranian Quarterly* 2 (2001): 51. Phone interview with Ambassador Fereydoun Hoveyda, former head of the Permanent Mission of Iran to the UN, Washington, D.C., March 3, 2004. Athari, "Iranian-Egyptian relations," 51–52. Interview with Henry Precht, former Iran desk officer at the U.S. Department of State, Washington, D.C., March 3, 2004.
- 10 Phone interview with Fereydoun Hoveyda, March 3, 2004.
- 11 Interview with former Iranian diplomat under the Shah, Washington, D.C., April 2, 2004.
- 12 R. K. Ramazani, "Iran and the Arab-Israeli Conflict," *Middle East Journal* 3 (1978): 418.
- 13 Athari, "Iranian-Egyptian Relations," 51–52.
- 14 Interview with Gholam-Reza Afkhami, an advisor to the Mohammad Reza Shah, Washington, D.C., March 5, 2004. Iranian diplomats in New York were instructed by the Shah to assist the Egyptians in creating ties with U.S. lawmakers and leaders of the Jewish-American community to facilitate Egypt's transition to the pro-Western camp. Phone interview with Fereydoun Hoveyda, March 3, 2004.
- 15 Ramazani, "Iran and the Arab-Israeli Conflict," 418.
- 16 Asadollah Alam, *The Shah and I*, ed. Alinaghi Alikhani (New York: St. Martin's, 1991), 152.
- 17 Phone interview with Fereydoun Hoveyda, March 3, 2004.
- 18 Interview, Tel Aviv, October 31, 2004.
- 19 Alam, *The Shah and I*, 179–180. The confidential meeting was arranged by the Shah's Court Marshall, Asadollah Alam, without the knowledge of the Iranian Foreign Minister.
- 20 Henry Paolucci, *Iran, Israel and the United States* (New York: Griffon House, 1991), 10.
- 21 Interview with former Iranian deputy UN Ambassador Mehdi Ehsassi, Tehran, August 3, 2004.
- 22 Interview with Alinaghi Alikhani, April 7, 2004.
- 23 Interview with a former deputy commander in chief of the Iranian navy, March 16, 2004.
- 24 Segev, *Iranian Triangle*, 77–78.
- 25 Interview with former Iranian intelligence officer, Washington, D.C., March 14, 2004.
- 26 Interview with a former deputy commander in chief of the Iranian Navy, March 16, 2004.

- 38 Interview with former National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft, Washington, D.C., September 27, 2004.
- 39 Interview with Deputy Foreign Minister Hadi Nejad-Hosseini, Tehran, August 12, 2004.
- 40 Interview with Ali Reza Alavi Tabar, Tehran, August 21, 2004. Interview with Gen. Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, Tel Aviv, October 25, 2004.
- 41 Interview with adviser to the Iranian National Security Advisor, Tehran, August 2004.
- 42 Interview with former Deputy Foreign Minister Mahmoud Vaezi, Tehran, August 16, 2004. (The Iranian government views its rhetoric simply as an expression of opinion and not necessarily an action plan. This enables Iran to pursue one policy while portraying itself as the champion of a completely different policy.)
- 43 Interview with former member of Parliament and lead reformist strategist Mohsen Mirdamadi, Tehran, August 22, 2004.

CHAPTER 13 The New World Order

Epigraph: Interview with U.S. Ambassador Daniel Kurtzer, Tel Aviv, October 19, 2004.

- 1 David Kimche, *The Last Option* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1991), 236.
- 2 Interview with former National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft, Washington, D.C., September 27, 2004.
- 3 Efraim Halevi, *Man in the Shadows* (New York: St. Martin's, 2006), 33-34.
- 4 Phone interview with Efraim Halevi, former head of the Mossad, June 17, 2006.
- 5 Kimche, *Last Option*, 236.
- 6 The Iranian intelligence services even alerted the Kuwaiti government hours before the Iraqis attacked. *Ibid.*, 233.
- 7 Shireen Hunter, *Iran After Khomeini* (New York: Praeger, 1992), 126.
- 8 Paul J. White and William S. Logan, *Remaking the Middle East* (New York: Berg, 1997), 201.
- 9 John Esposito and R. K. Ramazani, *Iran at the Crossroads* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 220.
- 10 Interview with former Deputy Foreign Minister Mahmoud Vaezi, Tehran, August 16, 2004.
- 11 For a discussion on the significance of Secretary Baker's statement, see R. K. Ramazani, "Move Iran Outside the 'Axis,'" *Christian Science Monitor*, August 19, 2002.
- 12 Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *After Khomeini* (London: Routledge, 1995), 160. Shahram Chubin, "Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era," *RAND* (2001), 12. Interview with Mustafa Zahrani of the Iranian Foreign Ministry, New York, February 26, 2004.
- 13 Esposito and Ramazani, *Iran at the Crossroads*, 151. David Menashri, *Post-Revolutionary Politics in Iran* (London: Frank Cass, 2001), 252. White and Logan, *Remaking the Middle East*, 209. This remarkable shift was captured in a statement by Iran's foreign minister, Ali Akbar Velayati, while on a visit to Moscow in March 1996. Iranian-Russian relations, Velayati said, were "at their highest level in contemporary history." *RAND*, March 7, 1996. Esposito and Ramazani, *Iran at the Crossroads*, 7. Rather than exporting its Islamic revo-

- lution to the newly freed states of central Asia, Iran pursued a pro-status quo policy based on economic exchange and cultural—rather than religious—affinity.
- 14 Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).
 - 15 Interview with Amir Mohebian, Tehran, August 19, 2004. The statement resembles the title of one of Khairallah Talfah's pan-Arab writings (Talfah was Saddam Hussein's uncle): "Three things God should not have created: Jews, Persians and mosquitoes."
 - 16 Interview with Mohammad Reza Dehshiri, head of Regional Studies Department, School of International Relations, Iranian Foreign Ministry, Tehran, August 24, 2004.
 - 17 Interview with Mohammad Reza Tajik, counselor to President Khatami and director of the Strategic Studies Center of the President's Office, Tehran, August 25, 2004.
 - 18 Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Raymond Hinnebusch, *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2002), 83. Interview with Iranian political strategist, March 2004.
 - 19 Chubin, "Iran's Security Policy." Interview with Nasser Hadian, reformist strategist in Iran, New York, February 26, 2004.
 - 20 Interview with Javad Zarif, Iran's ambassador to the UN, New York, April 1, 2004.
 - 21 Presentation by Shahram Chubin, Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars, November 9, 2004.
 - 22 Interview with Vaezi, August 16, 2004.
 - 23 Interview with Shmuel Limone, Ministry of Defense, secretary of Israel's Iran committee, Tel Aviv, October 18, 2004.
 - 24 *Jerusalem Post*, October 1, 1997.
 - 25 Interview with Mahmoud Sariolghalam, professor at Shahid Beheshti University and adviser to the Iranian National Security Advisor, August 18, 2004, Tehran.
 - 26 Kenneth Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle* (New York: Random House, 2004), 259.
 - 27 Dafna Linzer, "Iran Is Judged 10 Years from Nuclear Bomb," *Washington Post*, August 2, 2005.
 - 28 IAEA Resolution GOV/2006/14, February 4, 2006.
 - 29 Menashri, *Post-Revolutionary Politics in Iran*, 297.
 - 30 Interview with Iranian political strategist, February 2004.
 - 31 Interview with Zarif, April 1, 2004.
 - 32 Interview with Vaezi, August 16, 2004.
 - 33 Interview with Ali Reza Alavi Tabar, Tehran, August 21, 2004.
 - 34 Christopher Boucek, "An Impact Greater Than Its Size: Israeli Foreign Policy in Central Asia," master's thesis, 1999, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 9. Interview with Mustafa Zahrani of the Iranian Foreign Ministry, New York, February 26, 2004.
 - 35 Ehteshami, *After Khomeini*, 154.
 - 36 White and Logan, *Remaking the Middle East*, 203. Hunter, *Iran After Khomeini*, 133. Esposito and Ramazani, *Iran at the Crossroads*, 217. Interview with Gary Sick, New York, February 25, 2004.
 - 37 Hunter, *Iran After Khomeini*, 136. Interview with Siamak Namazi, Atieh Bahar Consulting, Tehran, August 2, 2004.
 - 38 Interview with Scowcroft, September 27, 2004. White and Logan, *Remaking the Middle East*, 202.

- 39 Hooshang Amirahmadi, "The Spiraling Gulf Arms Race," *Middle East Insight* 2 (1994): 48.
- 40 Interview with Tabar, August 21, 2004.
- 41 Amirahmadi, "The Spiraling Gulf Arms Race," 49.
- 42 Interview with Ambassador Nabil Fahmi, Washington, D.C., October 12, 2004.
- 43 James Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy* (New York: Putnam, 1995), 412.
- 44 Amirahmadi, "The Spiraling Gulf Arms Race," 49; White and Logan, *Remaking the Middle East*, 204.
- 45 Interview with Shlomo Brom, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv, October 26, 2004. "Israel's strategic position was very much improved," said Ephraim Kam of the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies at Tel Aviv University. "The collapse of the Soviet Union was very important in the end." Interview with Ephraim Kam, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv, October 26, 2004.
- 46 Interview with Eynat Shlein, Israeli embassy in Washington, June 1, 2004. Interview with Kam, October 26, 2004.
- 47 Interview with Ehud Yaari, Jerusalem, October 24, 2004.
- 48 Max Abrahms, "A Window of Opportunity for Israel?" *Middle East Quarterly* (Summer 2003).
- 49 Phone interview with Halevi, June 17, 2006.
- 50 Interview with Israel's former Minister of Finance Dan Meridor, Tel Aviv, October 27, 2004.
- 51 Interview with Keith Weissman of American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), Washington, D.C., March 25, 2004. The war showed that "there is no such thing as Arab unity," according to an Israeli diplomat at the Israeli UN Mission who spoke on condition of nonattribution. Interviewed March 31, 2004; New York.
- 52 Interview with Brom, October 26, 2004.
- 53 Interview with Ambassador Daniel Kurtzer, Tel Aviv, October 19, 2004.
- 54 Interview with Yaari, October 24, 2004.
- 55 Uri Savir, *The Process: 1,100 Days That Changed the Middle East* (New York: Random House, 1998), 27.
- 56 David W. Lesch, *The Middle East and the United States* (Boulder: Westview, 2003), 278.
- 57 Interview with Shai Feldman and Shlomo Brom, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv, October 26 and 27, 2004.
- 58 Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, 415, 428.
- 59 Halevi, *Man in the Shadows*, 33-34.
- 60 Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, 117, 123, 129.
- 61 Barry Rubin, "The United States and the Middle East, 1992," *Middle East Contemporary Survey* (1992).
- 62 Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, 423, 125, 131.
- 63 Phone interview with Halevi, June 17, 2006.
- 64 Interview with Kurtzer, October 19, 2004.
- 65 Baker, *Politics of Diplomacy*, 444.
- 66 Interview with Ambassador Dennis Ross, Washington, D.C., May 29, 2004.
- 67 Interview with Kenneth Pollack, Washington, D.C., November 29, 2004.
- 68 Interview with Assistant Secretary of State Robert Pelletreau, Washington, D.C., March 1, 2004.

- 69 Interview with Scowcroft, September 27, 2004.
- 70 Interview with Pelletreau, March 1, 2004. Interview with Ross, May 29, 2004.
- 71 Interview with Scowcroft, September 27, 2004.
- 72 Interview with Israeli diplomat who spoke on condition of nonattribution, New York, March 31, 2004.
- 73 Interview with Kurtzer, October 19, 2004.
- 74 Interview with Tabar, August 21, 2004. "We could have played a positive role in the region. We expected much better behavior [from the United States]," Tabar recalled.
- 75 Ehteshami and Hinnebusch, *Foreign Policies of Middle East States*, 302.
- 76 Pollack, *Persian Puzzle*, 254.
- 77, Ehteshami, *After Khomeini*, 157. Interview with Bijan Khajepour, Atieh Bahar Consulting, Washington, D.C., February 17, 2004.
- 78 Emma Murphy, "The Impact of the Arab-Israeli Peace Process on the International Security and Economic Relations of the Persian Gulf," *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs* 2 (Summer 1996): 441.
- 79 Interview with Deputy Foreign Minister Hadi Nejad-Hosseini, Tehran, August 12, 2004.
- 80 Interviews with Nejad-Hosseini, August 12, 2004; Tabar, August 21, 2004; Tajik, August 25, 2004; Namazi, August 2, 2004; and Bijan Khajepour, February 17, 2004. Additional officials who spoke on condition of nonattribution confirmed this.
- 81 Interview with Namazi, August 2, 2004.
- 82 Interview with Tajik, August 25, 2004.
- 83 Fearing that Iraq's disintegration would leave Iran completely unchecked, Washington decided to keep Saddam in power in order to balance Iran. Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, 247.
- 84 Interview with Col. Lawrence Wilkerson, former U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell's chief of staff, Washington, D.C., October 16, 2006.
- 85 Interview with Namazi, August 2, 2004.
- 86 Interview with Masoud Eslami of the Iranian Foreign Ministry, Tehran, August 23, 2004.
- 87 Interview with Tajik, August 25, 2004. Overall, more than a dozen Iranian officials from all political factions confirmed that Iran was willing to participate in the Madrid conference and that its behavior would have been more conciliatory had it been invited to the conference.
- 88 Interview with Iranian political strategist, August 2004.
- 89 Interview with Tabar, August 21, 2004. Interview with Mohebian, August 19, 2004.
- 90 Interview with Tajik, August 25, 2004.
- 91 Interview with Ross, May 29, 2004.
- 92 Interview with Mohebian, August 19, 2004.
- 93 Interview with Tabar, August 21, 2004. Interview with Mohebian, August 19, 2004.
- 94 R. K. Ramazani, review of Mahmoud Sariolghalam's *The Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic*, in *Discourse: An Iranian Quarterly* 2 (2001): 216. Interview with Mohebian, August 19, 2004.
- 95 *Ettela'at*, September 11, 1993.
- 96 Interview with Israeli diplomat who spoke on condition of nonattribution, New York, March 31, 2004.

- 72 *Haaretz*, June 20, 1999. Former Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami does not recall having received such an offer from the Iranians. Phone interview, May 21, 2006.
- 73 *AIC Insight 2* (2004).
- 74 Mark Katz, "Iran and America: Is Rapprochement Finally Possible?," *Middle East Policy* 4 (2005): 61.
- 75 Interview with Gerald Steinberg, professor at Bar Ilan University in Israel, Jerusalem, October 28, 2004.
- 76 AFP, April 5, 1993.
- 77 Phone interview with Ben-Ami, May 21, 2006.
- 78 H. E. Chehabi, ed., *Distant Relations: Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 230.
- 79 Interview with Gen. Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, Tel Aviv, October 25, 2004.
- 80 "Iran Told Hezbollah to Act Inside Israel," *Haaretz*, March 29, 2000.
- 81 Phone interview with Ben-Ami, May 21, 2006.
- 82 *Ibid.*
- 83 Interview with Gold, October 28, 2004. Tel Aviv feared that Washington, motivated by lucrative business opportunities in Iran, would overlook Israeli concerns and end its policy of isolating Iran.
- 84 Phone interview with former head of Mossad, Efraim Halevi, June 17, 2006. "There is always a degree of apprehension, of concern that there might be an American concession of sorts which otherwise would not have been contemplated."
- 85 Phone interview with Ben-Ami, May 21, 2006.
- 86 Interview with Israel's former Minister of Finance Dan Meridor, Tel Aviv, October 27, 2004.
- 87 "U.S. Move to Engage Iran Worries Supporters of Israel," JTA, June 22, 1998.
- 88 Israel was careful not to come across as too dismissive of the reformist winds in Iran and expressed cautious optimism regarding the elections. "Israel Cautiously Welcomes Election Results in Iran," *Xinhua*, February 20, 2000.
- 89 "Beilin: Time to 'Reassess' Iran Relations," *Haaretz*, April 5, 2000.
- 90 Interview with Makovsky, June 3, 2004.
- 91 "Softer Israeli Policy Sees Iran as 'Threat, Not Enemy,'" *Haaretz*, July 8, 1999.
- 92 David Makovsky, *Making Peace with the PLO* (Boulder: Westview, 1996), 112.
- 93 "Israel Condemns Recent 'Terrorist' Attacks in Iran," *Yediot Aharonot*, March 17, 2000.
- 94 "Israel Says Iran Missile Test Reflects Nuclear Ambitions," UPI, July 15, 2000.
- 95 "Israel Rejects Talks with Iran: Former FM," *Xinhua*, September 26, 2000.
- 96 Interview with Iranian reformist strategist, February 2004.
- 97 Phone interview with Ben-Ami, May 21, 2006.
- 98 Bill Samii, "Iran Welcomes Israeli Withdrawal," *RFE/RL Iran Report*, May 29, 2000.
- 99 Bill Samii, "Israeli Withdrawal Leaves Questions Unanswered," *RFE/RL Iran Report*, June 5, 2000.
- 100 Safa Haeri, "Iran Tells a Bewildered Syria Hezbollah Must Play It Cool," Iran Press Service, May 29, 2000.
- 101 "Israel: Source Says Iran Inciting 'Terrorist Acts' to Spoil Political Process," *Voice of Israel*, July 23, 2000.
- 102 Phone interview with Halevi, June 17, 2006.

- 103 Phone interview with Ben-Ami, May 21, 2006.
- 104 See Clayton Swisher, *The Truth About Camp David: The Untold Story About the Collapse of the Middle East Peace Process* (New York: Nation Books, 2004), and Hussein Agha and Robert Malley, "Camp David: The Tragedy of Errors," *New York Review of Books*, August 9, 2001.
- 105 Interview with Robert Malley, Washington, D.C., April 22, 2004.
- 106 Remarks by Yoram Schweitzer, delivered at the Iranian Challenge Seminar, the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, February 19, 2004.
- 107 "Iran: Official Welcomes Egypt's, Jordan's Decisions on Ties with Israel," *RAND*, November 22, 2000.
- 108 "Khamenei Calls for Muslim Unity Against Israel," *Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, December 27, 2000.
- 109 "Intifada Helps Iran Warm Ties with Arab World," Reuters, March 6, 2001.
- 110 "Israel: Security Sources Say Iran Funding Some of Fatah's Activists," *Voice of Israel*, July 11, 2001.
- 111 "Iran Wants War-Crimes Court to Try Israel," AFP, November 19, 2000.
- 112 *Israel Line*, February 4, 1999.
- 113 AFP, May 2, 1998, April 10, 1999.
- 114 E-mail interview with former European ambassador to Iran, who spoke on condition of nonattribution, January 2005.

CHAPTER 18 Betrayal in Afghanistan

- Interview with Deputy Foreign Minister Hadi Nejad-Hosseini, Tehran, Aug 12, 2004. "It's illogical to tie the solution of a small problem to solving a much bigger problem!" he told me in his Tehran office.
- "Israel to Face Iran Alone When U.S. Lifts Sanctions," *Haaretz*, February 19, 2001.
- Confirmation hearing of Gen. Colin Powell as secretary of state, January 17, 2001.
- Interview with Ambassador James Dobbins, Washington, D.C., October 24, 2006.
- Interview with Col. Lawrence Wilkerson, Secretary of State Colin Powell's chief of staff, Washington, D.C., October 16, 2006.
- "Israel to Face Iran Alone When U.S. Lifts Sanctions," *Haaretz*, February 19, 2001.
- Testimony of Howard Kohr to the House International Relations Committee, May 9, 2001.
- "Renew ILSA: Let the Real Moderates Win in Iran," *WINEP*, June 14, 2001.
- Iran and Israel continued to exchange accusations, but Tehran had toned down its poisonous rhetoric and focused more on isolating Israel internationally by, for instance, urging Muslim states to help push for an international ban on arms sales to Israel. "Iran: Foreign Minister Calls for Weapons Sanction against Israel," *RAND*, August 20, 2001.
- Flynt Leverett, "Illusion and Reality," *American Prospect*, September 12, 2006.
- Gareth Porter, "How Neocons Sabotaged Iran's Help on al-Qaeda," *IPS*, February 23, 2006.
- Leverett, "Illusion and Reality."
- Interview with Yossi (Joseph) Alpher, former Mossad official and senior adviser to Ehud Barak, Tel Aviv, October 27, 2004.
- Patrick Bishop, "Worried Israel Feels Spurned as the West Courts Iran," *Daily Telegraph*, September 26, 2001.

- 15 Letter by the Project for the New America Century to President George Bush, September 20, 2001. Other prominent neoconservatives who courted the Bush administration with the idea of invading Iraq include Bernard Lewis and Fouad Ajami.
- 16 Porter, "How Neocons Sabotaged Iran's Help on al-Qaeda."
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Kenneth Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle* (New York: Random House, 2004), 346-347.
- 19 Interview with Wilkerson, October 16, 2006. Interview with Dobbins, October 24, 2006.
- 20 Speech by Ambassador James Dobbins to the New America Foundation, Washington, D.C., August 24, 2006. Interview with Javad Zarif, Iran's ambassador to the UN, New York, October 12, 2006. Pollack, *Persian Puzzle*, 347. Michael Hirsh and Maziar Bahari, "Blowup? America's Hidden War with Iran," *Newsweek*, February 19, 2007. The interim constitution put Hamid Karzai in power in Afghanistan. This was not an uncontroversial decision. Several Afghani warlords refused to recognize his authority. One such warlord was Ismail Khan, whose close ties to Iran were well known. To remove any doubt of Tehran's wishes, Iran's foreign minister attended Karzai's inauguration and brought Ismail Khan with him just to make sure no one doubted that he was going to support Karzai.
- 21 "Iranian diplomats who dealt with U.S. counterparts during this period indicated that there was interest in Tehran in using this cooperation to effect a broader opening to the United States." Leverett, "Illusion and Reality."
- 22 Interview with Dobbins, October 24, 2006.
- 23 Interview with Zarif, October 12, 2006.
- 24 Interview with Wilkerson, October 16, 2006.
- 25 Speech by Dobbins to the New America Foundation, August 24, 2006.
- 26 Interview with Dobbins, October 24, 2006. Gareth Porter, "How Neocons Sabotaged Iran's Help on al-Qaeda," *IPS*, February 23, 2006.
- 27 James Bennet, "Sharon Invokes Munich in Warning U.S. on 'Appeasement,'" *New York Times*, October 5, 2001.
- 28 Jack Donnelly, "Nation Set to Push Sharon on Agreement," *Boston Globe*, October 10, 2001.
- 29 "Majlis Deputy Says Israel Angered by Iran's Current Foreign Policy Posture," *Aftab-e Yazd*, September 29, 2001. Another lawmaker, Mohsen Armin, echoed the same views in an interview with *Norooz*. "Reformist Official Comments on National Security, Ties with USA, Israel," *Norooz*, November 17, 2001.
- 30 Christopher Hitchens, "Minority Report," *Nation*, November 14, 1988, 482.
- 31 Jim Lobe, "Ledeen's Way," *IPS*, July 3, 2003.
- 32 Michael Ledeem courted the pro-monarchist Iranian opposition in the United States and appeared regularly on the exiled satellite TV stations operating out of Los Angeles. Though only two decades earlier he had been intimately involved in facilitating arms sales to the clerical regime in Tehran, he now portrayed himself as a champion of the Iranian student movement.
- 33 Edward Herman and Gerry O'Sullivan, *The "Terrorism" Industry* (New York: Pantheon, 1989), 161.
- 34 Joshua Micah Marshall, Laura Rozen, and Paul Glasstris, "Iran-Contra II?," *The Washington Monthly*, September 2004.

- 35 Laura Rozen, "Three Days in Rome," *Mother Jones*, July/August, 2006. Seymour M. Hersh, "Moving Targets," *New Yorker*, December 15, 2003.
- 36 Marshall, Rozen, and Glasstris, "Iran-Contra II?"
- 37 Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*, 350-351.
- 38 Ali Ansari, *Confronting Iran* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 186. Pollack, *Persian Puzzle*, 351.
- 39 Interview with Dobbins, October 24, 2006. Interview with Zarif, October 12, 2006. Interview with Wilkerson, October 16, 2006.
- 40 *AIC Insight 2* (2004).
- 41 Interview with Wilkerson, October 16, 2006.
- 42 Porter, "How Neocons Sabotaged Iran's Help on al-Qaeda."
- 43 Gary Sick, "Iran: Confronting Terrorism," *Washington Quarterly* 4 (2003): 90. Wilkerson argued that Iran's inclusion was motivated more by the need of a third country for rhetorical purposes than an actual belief that the regime in Iran belonged to the same category as those in Iraq and North Korea. Interview with Wilkerson, October 16, 2006.
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- 45 Scott Peterson, "Pragmatism May Trump Zeal as Iran's Power Grows," *Christian Science Monitor*, July 6, 2006.
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- 52 "Israel to Ask World to Declare Iran Terror-Supporting State," *Voice of Israel*, January 4, 2002.
- 53 "Israel Compiles 'Black Book' on Iran, Says Peres," AFP, January 26, 2002.
- 54 "Khatami Urges World to Boycott Israel," *RAND*, January 29, 2002.
- 55 "Iran to Revenge with Missiles if Israel Bombs Nuclear Plant," Tass, February 7, 2002.
- 56 "Washington Wants Israel to 'Cool It' over Iran: Report," AFP, February 6, 2006.
- 57 "Iran Not an Enemy for Israel, Says National Security Chief," AFP, February 18, 2006.

CHAPTER 19 Snatching Defeat from the Jaws of Victory

Epigraph: Interview with leading Israeli military commentator, who spoke on condition of anonymity, Tel Aviv, October 17, 2004.

- 1 Neil Mackay, "Bush Planned Iraq 'Regime Change' Before Becoming President," *Sunday Herald*, September 15, 2002.
- 2 "Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century," *Project for the New American Century*, September 2000. See <http://www.newamericancentury.org/RebuildingAmericasDefenses.pdf>.
- 3 After the war, many Israelis have concluded that the invasion of Iraq worked to Israel's detriment. Yuval Diskin, the chief of the Israeli internal security service, the Shin Bet, told a crowd of Israeli settlers in February 2006 that a strong dictatorship in Iraq would be preferable to the present chaos there. "I'm not sure we won't miss Saddam," he said. "Israel 'May Rue Saddam Overthrow,'" *BBC*, February 9, 2006.

- 50 Porter, "Burnt Offering." Flynt Leverett also questioned the validity of the intelligence claiming an Iranian role in Saudi bombings during a panel discussion at the Center for American Progress, December 15, 2006.
- 51 Interview with Zarif, October 12, 2006.
- 52 The Iranian Jewish Public Affairs Committee is a small organization headquartered in Los Angeles. Its policy positions tend to be close to those of American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).
- 53 Mark Benjamin and Eli Lake, "Senator Asks \$50M to Aid Iran Dissidents," UPI, April 8, 2003.
- 54 Marc Perelman, "New Front Sets Sights on Toppling Iran Regime," *Forward*, May 16, 2003.
- 55 Interview with Keith Weissman of American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), Washington, D.C., March 25, 2004.
- 56 "Brownback Presses French Not to Turn Over Iranian Opposition Figures," Brownback press release, June 20, 2003.
- 57 Interview with senior Iranian official who spoke on the condition of nonattribution, Tehran, August 2004.
- 58 Corera, "Iran's Gulf of Misunderstanding with U.S."
- 59 Interview with Menashe Amir, head of the Israeli Radio's Persian Service, Jerusalem, October 24, 2004.
- 60 Interview with Ephraim Sneh, Tel Aviv, October 31, 2004.
- 61 Interview with leading Israeli military commentator who spoke on condition of anonymity, Tel Aviv, October 17, 2004.
- 62 Interview with Hadi Nejad-Hosseini, Tehran, August 12, 2004.

CHAPTER 20 Facing the Future, Facing Reality

Epigraph: Joschka Fischer, "The Case for Bargaining with Iran," *Washington Post*, May 29, 2006.

- 1 The United States has with much success maintained strategic relations with states it opposes ideologically. A case in point is Saudi Arabia, with which the United States has maintained a very close and strategic relationship for many decades even though the Saudi Kingdom has been ruled for this entire period by the most austere and repressive Wahhabi sect of Sunni Islam.
- 2 Interview with Joseph Alpher, Tel Aviv, October 27, 2004. Many Iranians recognized Israel's fear of improved U.S.-Iran relations. "The more the U.S. saw Iran and Iraq as threats, the greater Israel's strategic security became," argued Masoud Eslami. Interview with Masoud Eslami of the Iranian Foreign Ministry, Tehran, August 23, 2004.
- 3 Interview with Shlomo Brom, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv, October 26, 2004.
- 4 In his "Ideology and Pragmatism in Iran's Foreign Policy," R. K. Ramazani argues that, historically, pragmatism has triumphed over ideology in Iranian foreign policy. See *Middle East Journal* 4 (2004): 549-559.
- 5 Interview with Mohsen Mirdamadi, former member of Parliament and lead Reformist strategist, Tehran, August 22, 2004.
- 6 Ray Takeyh, "Iranian Options: Pragmatic Mullahs and America's Interests," *National Interest* 73 (2003): 51.

- 7 RAND, April 12, 2003. It is noticeable, however, that Rafsanjani sought to present his argument as an ideologically based criticism against the emphasis on *vazifeh*.
- 8 Phone interview with Abbas Maleki, Iranian deputy foreign minister in the early and mid-1990s, Geneva, January 27, 2005.
- 9 Mahmoud Sariolghalam, "Justice for All," *Washington Quarterly* 3 (2001): 115. "No leadership, however strong, can act against [Iran's] geopolitical rationale," Sariolghalam wrote.
- 10 Barry Rubin, "Iran: The Rise of a Regional Power," *The Middle East Review of International Affairs* 10, no. 3 (September 2006).
- 11 Phone interview with Ben-Ami, May 21, 2006.
- 12 Mohammad Quchani, "The Jewish Issue Is Not Our Issue," *Sharaq*, March 1, 2006.
- 13 Anderson Cooper, CNN, September 21, 2006.
- 14 Interview with Keith Weissman of American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), Washington, D.C., March 25, 2004.
- 15 Dafna Linzer, "Iran Is Judged 10 Years from Nuclear Bomb," *Washington Post*, August 2, 2005.
- 16 Interview with Itamar Rabinovich, former adviser to Rabin and Israeli ambassador to the United States, Tel Aviv, October 17, 2004.
- 17 Dafna Linzer, "Past Arguments Don't Square with Current Iran Policy," *Washington Post*, March 27, 2005.
- 18 On May 30, 2006, the 144 countries in the Non-Aligned Movement issued a statement upholding Iran's right to uranium enrichment. Mark Heinrich, "Iran: No Global Consensus Against It Despite Pressure," Reuters, June 14, 2006.
- 19 Marc Perelman, "U.S. Pursues Diplomacy on Iran Nukes," *Forward*, January 27, 2006.
- 20 Herb Keinon, "Israel 'May Go It Alone' Against Iran," *Jerusalem Post*, August 24, 2006.
- 21 Eric Fingerhut and Debra Rubin, "Iran, Hamas Dominate AIPAC," *Washington Jewish Week*, March 9, 2006.
- 22 Ron Kampeas, "With Time Short on Iran Nukes, AIPAC Criticizes Bush Approach," JTA, December 4, 2005.
- 23 Transcript of Online *Newshour*, March 18, 2004, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/international/jan-june04/elbaradei_3-18.html.
- 24 Interview with Shmuel Limone, Ministry of Defense, secretary of Israel's Iran committee, Tel Aviv, October 18, 2004.
- 25 Interview with Javad Zarif, Iran's ambassador to the UN, New York, April 1, 2004.
- 26 "I don't believe that they are doing it [pursuing the nuclear option] to nuke Israel," Ben-Ami told me. "I have been saying that in Israel for quite some time, and it has never been very popular. Let us put it this way: Of course Israel should not be interested in Iran having a nuclear bomb. But then, having said that, one should try to see what is really behind the march to a nuclear capacity." Phone interview with Ben-Ami, May 21, 2006.
- 27 Interview with Shai Feldman, Tel Aviv, October 27, 2004.
- 28 Interview with Ehud Yaari, Jerusalem, October 24, 2004.
- 29 Phone interview with Halevi, June 17, 2006. "The Iranians are not irrational. They hold extreme views, but they are not irrational," Brom added. Interview with Brom, October 26, 2004.

- 30 Phone interview with Reuven Pedatzur, director of the Galili Center for Strategy and National Security, Tel Aviv, November 24, 2005.
- 31 Interview with Gerald Steinberg, professor at Bar Ilan University in Israel, Jerusalem, October 28, 2004. See also Project Daniel, a 2003 survey commissioned to assess the threat to Israel from other states in the Middle East. It was prepared by a high-powered team of Israeli foreign policy and military experts. The report was submitted to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and was discussed among Israel, the United States, and NATO.
- 32 "Iran: Expediency Council Office Says Israel Distorted Its Chairman's Remarks," *RAND*, January 2, 2002.
- 33 Students of American history will note an eerie similarity with what Richard Nixon called his "madman theory." In search of a way to end the Vietnam War on terms favorable to the United States, Nixon told his advisers that it would be useful to let word slip out, as a bluff, that Nixon was so obsessed with the Communists that he'd do anything to win the war, including the use of nuclear weapons against Hanoi. See Seymour Hersh, *The Price of Power* (New York: Summit Books, 1983), 52-53.
- 34 *International Crisis Group Report*, November 24, 2004.
- 35 Interview with adviser to the Iranian National Security Advisor, August 2004, Tehran.
- 36 Israel similarly believed that India, mindful of its conflict with Muslim Pakistan, was fighting the laws of geopolitics by refusing to recognize Israel and establish security ties with it.
- 37 Interview with Ephraim Sneh, member of Knesset, Tel Aviv, October 31, 2004.
- 38 Interview with Menashe Amir, head of the Israeli Radio's Persian Service, Jerusalem, October 24, 2004.
- 39 Interview with Ranaan Gissin, Jerusalem, October 31, 2004. Former Defense Minister Moshe Arens agreed and argued that every regime in Iran will pursue the nuclear option, and thus that there is very little the outside world can do to stop Tehran. Interview with former Minister of Defense Moshe Arens, Tel Aviv, October 21, 2004.
- 40 Uzi Arad, "Russia and Iran's Nuclear Program," *Jerusalem Issue Brief*, April 28, 2003.
- 41 Interview with Gen. Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, Tel Aviv, October 25, 2004.
- 42 Interview with Gen. Amos Gilad, Tel Aviv, October 31, 2004.
- 43 Matthew Kalman, "Israel Set War Plan More Than a Year Ago," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 21, 2006.
- 44 Max Blumenthal, "Birth Pangs of a New Christian Zionism," *Nation*, August 8, 2006. Uzi Mahnaimi, "Humbling of the Supertroops Shatters Israeli Army Morale," *Sunday Times*, August 27, 2006.
- 45 Roe Nahmias, "Hizbullah: We Were Surprised by Israel's Response to Kidnapping," *YNews*, August 26, 2006.
- 46 Interview with Javad Zarif, Iran's ambassador to the UN, New York, October 12, 2006.
- 47 Michael Slackman, "Iran Hangs in Suspense as the Conflict Plays Out," *New York Times*, July 29, 2006.
- 48 Guy Dinmore, "Experts Challenge White House Line on Iran's Influence," *Financial Times*, July 18 2006.
- 49 Slackman, "Iran Hangs in Suspense."
- 50 Interview with Gerald M. Steinberg, *Council on Foreign Relations*, August 1, 2006. See <http://www.cfr.org/publication/11215/>.
- 51 Ze'ev Schiff, "Tehran's Role Is Extensive," *Haaretz*, July 16, 2006.

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- 53 Interview with Zarif, October 12, 2006.
- 54 Hassan M. Fattah, "Fearful of Iran, Arab Leaders Criticize Militants," *New York Times*, July 17, 2006.
- 55 "Dampened Trust? A Conversation with Nawaf Obaid," *SUSRIS*, August 22, 2006.
- 56 James D. Besser and Larry Cohler-Esses, "Iran-Israel Linkage by Bush Seen as a Threat," *The Jewish Week*, April 21, 2006.
- 57 Interview with Zarif, April 1, 2004.
- 58 Anne Barnard, "Iranians Debate Parameters for a Global Role," *Boston Globe*, September 5, 2006.
- 59 Joschka Fischer, "The Case for Bargaining with Iran," *Washington Post*, May 29, 2006.
- 60 Shlomo Ben-Ami, "The Basis for Iran's Belligerence," *Haaretz*, September 7, 2006.
- 61 Interview with Brom, October 26, 2004.
- 62 Interview with Shmuel Limone, Ministry of Defense, secretary of Israel's Iran committee, Tel Aviv, October 18, 2004.
- 63 Interview with Shmuel Bar, Tel Aviv, October 18, 2004.
- 64 Interview with Gilad, October 31, 2004.
- 65 Interview with Sneh, October 31, 2004. "We have no choice but to be superior to our immediate environment, because if we don't, we will be crushed. They will not wait a day," Yaari argued. Interview with Yaari, October 24, 2004. "There is a sense in Israel that it is much better to be alarmist, to be untrusting. Because anytime you stick your neck out or at all take a step forward, it is so easy to be proven wrong. And when you are proven wrong, you jeopardize the safety of the nation," Pollack noted. Interview with Kenneth Pollack, Washington, D.C., November 29, 2004.
- 66 Interview with Limone, October 18, 2004.
- 67 Interview with Feldman, October 27, 2004.
- 68 Interview with Limone, October 18, 2004.
- 69 David Ivry, "War Against Terror, Dilemmas of Values and Legality," *The Fisher Institute for Air and Space Strategic Studies*, April 2004, 2.
- 70 "Israel's Strategic Future—The Final Report of Project Daniel," *A Journal of Politics and the Arts* 3 (2004).
- 71 Interview with Bar, October 18, 2004.