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Multilateral Strategic and Security Building Blocks: Upgrading the NATO-Israeli Relationship, and Israel's Involvement in the US-led Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) Architecture

Herzliya Report

Oded Brosh & Lea Landman

Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS)
Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy
Interdisciplinary Center (IDC) Herzliya

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Introduction

Among the extensive spectrum of crucial strategic and security challenges and threats that need to be addressed for the years to come, the Tenth Herzliya Conference focused upon the complex of multilateral and collective security aspects. Salient among these are those embodied in an upgraded NATO-Israeli relationship, and with respect to Israel's full partnership in the US-led Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) architecture, being deployed for regional and European defense against SSM threats, including non-conventional, and perhaps nuclear, strategic threats. Aspects of upgrading Israel's mutually beneficial cooperation with NATO in light of NATO's current ongoing process of revised definition of its missions, goals and methods were elaborated. Specific perspectives and recommendations have come to light and are detailed below. Finally, the details of the US-led global BMD architecture were presented and discussed. The latter discussion inevitably highlighted the Iranian Surface to Surface (SSM) threat to the region, to the Mediterranean theater and to Europe, as well as to the Continental United States (CONUS) in the longer term (a threat already envisaged in the North Korean context) In both fields – NATO and BMD – Israel's envisaged role in the structure of addressing threats, at least for the forthcoming decade or even beyond it, was seen to be on an upward gradient, for a multitude of reasons.

It is therefore inevitably mandated that within the parameters of NATO defining its envisaged mission for the forthcoming decade and beyond, and within the missions of the BMD architecture as regards regional defense, the Mediterranean theater and the defense of Europe – Israel has and will have a key role to play. How NATO and Israel forge the upward gradient of mutually beneficial cooperation will depend on the definitions of interests, and on the talent of their implementation. On BMD, the US has already outlined an impeccably detailed progression, in which Israel plays a well-defined partnership role that serves the spectrum of challenges and threats. Future Herzliya Conferences will revisit these issues and examine their development, pitfalls and opportunities.

NATO-Israel Relations

In recent years NATO has undergone major changes in both its deployment and objectives. The two landmarks that caused the refocus were the end of the Cold War which rendered NATO's defensive strategy against the Soviet Union obsolete, and the 9/11 attacks on the US which changed both the profile of the enemy and the very nature of the battlefield. It also changed the theater of operation, and forced the Alliance to shift its attention from Europe to the Mediterranean, the Middle East and beyond.

In the past few years, Israel's relations with NATO have greatly expanded. The current volume of NATO-Israel exchanges is only second to the US-Israel military cooperation and is ahead of all Israel's other international military exchanges. Currently Israel participates in a limited number of NATO programs, exercises and working-groups. Israel was the first country to conclude an Individual Cooperation Programme (ICP) agreement with NATO, through which it conducts an ongoing strategic dialogue with the Alliance, covering a wide array of areas, including terrorism, intelligence sharing, nuclear proliferation, armaments and logistics, and rescue operations. Israel also joined NATO's naval control system in the Mediterranean, contributing a liaison naval intelligence officer to Operation Active Endeavor in the Alliance's headquarters in Naples. NATO's Council (NAC) has approved in principle Israel's offer to contribute a ship to the Alliance's patrols in the Mediterranean, but the process might still take time to materialize.

Nevertheless, despite the scope of cooperation, Israel and NATO are still far from reaping the full benefits of their potential cooperation. A NATO-Israel partnership could create a fruitful ground for cooperation in a variety of spheres: R&D, intelligence-sharing, missile defense, counter-terrorism, command and control, military instruction and NATO's involvement in Afghanistan. There is a series of fields in which Israel can share its experience with NATO, including mine-laying, low-intensity conflicts, training, counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism, and equipment maintenance, including closer relations with NATO's Maintenance and Supply Agency (NAMSA) with which Israel signed in November 2007 a Memorandum of Understanding on Logistic Support Cooperation. In return, Israel should realize the huge potential of partnership with the largest multilateral security organization and use NATO's experience in conflict management and large-scale catastrophes such as earthquakes. Strengthening relations with NATO will also increase Israel's interoperability, expose it to new ideas, provide it with lessons from others' experiences and offer important economic opportunities for the military industry. Although NATO is not directly threatened by the developing events in the Arabian Peninsula and the Horn of Africa, it has been increasingly involved in the Gulf of Aden anti-pirating activities. The latest developments in the Horn of Africa, and particularly in Yemen, are of increasing mutual importance to Israel and NATO, and this could create a potential for an increase in military cooperation between the two.

NATO's perspective

The "Declaration on Alliance Security", issued at the NATO Strasbourg-Kehl Summit in April 2009, tasked the formulation of the new Strategic Concept. The New Strategic Concept, which aims to reexamine NATO's core strategic concepts, seems to open up opportunities for a broader cooperation between Israel and NATO. The upcoming NATO Summit in Lisbon scheduled to take place in November 2010 is expected to approve the document. NATO Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, intends to allocate resources and focus attention on the formulation process and open it up to input from think-tanks, academia, and civil society networks.

The Strategic Concept will have to find agreement on a series of issues that are heatedly debated in NATO these days. The first important issue to be addressed is to find a proper balance between the capability to project power and to assure members that their security concerns are taken care of. The projection of power is a prerequisite to keep the US firmly tied to NATO, since if NATO is unable or unwilling to do anything that serves the strategic interests of the US, the alliance will lose its justification. An alliance has to be in the interests of all partners, and shared risks and responsibilities are the key to keep the alliance together.

Nevertheless, collective defense has to remain one of NATO's core missions since it is NATO's way to assure nations that they are prepared to engage forces in out of area operations. If nations feel that their security is not guaranteed by NATO, they will be reluctant to engage. In this context NATO has also taken Russian concerns into account, since NATO cannot achieve lasting security in Europe without Russia's cooperation and Europe does not want to achieve security against Russia but with Russia.

The second major issue to be addressed is NATO's tendency to go global, as prevalent in the past years, whereby the focus is shifted towards threats geographically remote from Europe. This trend, perhaps best illustrated by the campaign in Afghanistan, has been the main catalyst for enhanced Israel-NATO cooperation in the past few years and is likely to continue. At the same time, the conclusions from the Afghan and Iraqi experiences could be a joint US-EU decision to limit their respective involvement to perimeters directly threatening each of their respective territories. This includes NATO's relations vis-à-vis Russia and other related topics, such as energy security, global warming and cyber security, and Iran, North Korea and proliferation remain a priority for NATO.

The third major challenge to be addressed by the Strategic Concept is the nuclear domain – NATO needs to think through the role and function of nuclear weapons. The new Strategic Concept should end up including a sole purpose declaration; a declaration which means that nuclear weapons exist only to deter the use of nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons need to be kept in an arsenal for non-proliferation. The most effective non-proliferation instrument so far is extended deterrence provided by the US, which will play a role in the future as well. This concept has to be clearly mentioned in the New Strategic Concept. There is a fear, looking at Iran today, that this latter aspect of NATO's security provisions will become the first to be put to the test of reality. Should Iran become a nuclear power and cross the threshold, extended deterrence can be an instrument to prevent a poly-nuclear Middle East. NATO has to provide to those who may fear that they could be dominated by a nuclear Iran a nuclear guarantee so they renounce their nuclear aspirations. That would be a reality test for which, at this point, European public is not yet prepared and governments should seriously start to prepare their public for this possibility. NATO has to come out of its Strategic Concept process having stabilized itself, it has to get the Eastern relationship (Russia) and partnerships right. It should create conceptual, political, intellectual space, which ought to be used politically to redefine partnerships. It should enhance the political will to use that conceptual space.

The rewriting of the Strategic Concept allows for an interesting window of opportunities and more room for Israel to get closer to NATO. Israel should consider a contribution to the process underscoring the commonality of strategic challenges and threats facing both the Alliance and Israel, including the war on terror and WMD proliferation. Israel has a considerable interest in participating in this process on two counts. The first aim of the new Strategic Concept is to address NATO's challenges and new forms of strategic threats, such as cyber warfare. Israel and NATO should consider new areas of concrete cooperation to also include cyber warfare and missile defense. In this respect, it would be of particular interest to examine the possible strategic implications of the new US missile defense program (designated the "European Phased Adaptive Approach" – PAA – detailed below), of which Israel is considered an early partner, and which the US has offered as a national contribution to NATO's collective defense. Secondly, NATO will reassess the format and structure of its relations with non-member countries. In this respect, Israel should assess its goals with regard to future relations with the Alliance, and promote its understanding of the optimal structure to better future relations.

Areas of Cooperation

The Peace Process

Relations between Israel and NATO can also be upgraded as part of a settlement of the peace process. NATO is reluctant of engaging in the political aspects of the Arab-Israeli peace process but would be willing to send troops after a final agreement is reached. Also in Israel's view it is desirable that NATO will not engage in the political aspects of the conflict, since Israel prefers not to have too many external actors involved in the process. However, the trust that is gradually developing between Israel and NATO makes it more probable that Israel would support a role for NATO as a peace keeping force in the framework of any future peace deal between Israel and its neighbors. In fact, Israel reacted positively to the idea that NATO forces should be deployed as a buffer force along the Israel-Lebanon border in the wake of the 2006 war. It seems that what is lacking is not another peace plan, nor one more mediator. The parameters of an Israeli-Arab peace agreement are clear to all, and yet the parties are incapable of reaching a settlement. What is lacking is an international choreography whereby vital external actors, such as the US, NATO and the European Union, will advance assurances and offer baits to the parties that would help coax them into making the necessary concessions for peace. NATO's current position is that once a peace accord is reached, and the parties ask NATO to send a peacekeeping force, and the UN Security Council approves it, the Alliance would respond. However, NATO should consider assuming a commitment in advance of a peace deal as an incentive to the parties to advance the process. A promise for closer association of, say, Israel and Palestine to the EU, an offer by NATO that Israel could be a full member of the Alliance if it so wishes, or that the Alliance would assume responsibilities that would help guarantee the implementation of the security aspects of any peace deal should a settlement be reached, can serve as an important incentive.

Both because of the new focus of the Obama administration and because of the believe that the main foreign policy concern is the broader Middle East there is new interest within the American administration on the option of anchoring Israel to the transatlantic community as part of a "grand bargain" of the peace process. The main US strategic foreign policy concerns in the foreseeable future will be the broader Middle East, ranging from the Levant, through the Persian Gulf to Southeast Asia. European and American leaders speak more about strategic concerns in this region than on any other region, including China, Russia and the Balkans. This will be true even if alternative energy uses are developed and dependence on oil is reduced, because the issues of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism and regional stability will still require that US presidents put the area at the top of the agenda for any foreseeable future. The US has watched the debate on anchoring Israel to NATO with detachment and intellectual curiosity but never took it seriously. Paradoxically, there is more interest in the Obama administration for a possible upgrade in relations than there was during the Bush administration. There has been a positive shift in the US on whether the US should further integrate Israel in the debate, and there is a growing awareness of this issue in Europe. Should the US support an important upgrade, Germany, France, the UK, Italy and Poland would follow. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that the current US administration will push forward an upgrade for Israel and NATO. Although this issue comes up sporadically and periodically, it was never at the top of the US defense agenda, mainly because the bilateral relations overshadow every debate on that matter.

In view of the fact that currently there is no clear horizon for a dramatic change in Israel's status when it comes to the EU (and NATO), both sides should opt for a model that would allow harnessing the full potential of the relations and would support the peace process as well. This is clearly an Israeli interest and should be

one of the EU as well. If Europe wants to be heard in Israel more than it is currently, it must reach out to Israel and its public opinion and has to see in the development of a meaningful model, a European interest, not merely an Israeli one. Still, it appears that European constituencies have cooled towards both the EU and NATO in recent years, and that in any case domestic issues trump foreign policy issues in the European public debate. Should the US ask Israel to reposition itself and does Israel want to reposition itself, vis-à-vis Europe, NATO and the transatlantic community, Israel will need to create a more active policy and refocus itself. The Israeli debate on NATO has come a long way since it started about six years ago. Nevertheless, Israel has never managed to articulate its strategy with regards to NATO in a way that would put it on the political agenda. The formulation of NATO's new Strategic Concept could provide the opportunity to do so. Israel must define a long-term strategy vis-à-vis the Alliance. Before doing so, Israel should formulate its own national security doctrine and conduct a cost/benefit assessment relating to closer relations with the Alliance. Although the debate in Israel is not resolved, it seems that there is a positive shift towards the idea that a repositioning is necessary.

Missile Defense

The Tenth Herzliya Conference placed central emphasis on the discussion of the US Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) architecture laid forth for the next ten years and more. The issue was raised in both open and closed sessions of the Conference. Discussions at the Conference coincided with the release, on February 1, 2010, of the US Department of Defense Ballistic Missile Defense Review Report (BMDR) in Washington, the first ever of its kind. Noteworthy was the comment that an effective BMD is essential for reinforcing deterrence by strengthening its denial elements to supplement deterrence by threats of punishment, i.e. in case the latter are insufficient to deter adversary leaderships in the new envisaged conflict environments currently on the agenda.

"Deterrence is a powerful tool, and the United States is seeking to strengthen deterrence against these new challenges. But deterrence by threat of a strong offensive response may not be effective against these states in a time of political-military crisis. Risk-taking leaders may conclude that they can engage the United States in a confrontation if they can raise the stakes high enough by demonstrating the potential to do further harm with their missiles. Thus U.S. missile defenses are critical to strengthening regional deterrence."

Thus, the clear imaging of the ability to effectively defend against adversary ballistic missile threats, or attacks, should add an additional consideration to intimidate and therefore prevent altogether attacks by rogue states like Iran and North Korea, against the US, its allies or partners. Furthermore, the BMDR states that by implication in case deterrence still fails, an iron-clad-as-far-possible defense is mandated, to protect the US homeland, and for the regional defense of US forces, interests, allies and partners. Another purpose is to reassure allies and partners, and both denial and defense are incorporated as part of US extended deterrence guarantees policy parameters of the comprehensive strategic posture elaborated upon by the Obama administration concurrently with the BMDR – in the Quadrennial Defense Review Report (QDR), and the Nuclear Posture Review Report (NPR), issued on February 1 and April 6, 2010, respectively. The importance of establishing the credibility of extended deterrence has its own substantial reasoning, quite apart from the detailed discussion of BMD per se set forth during the Conference, but BMD is a central part of the effort.

In 2006, amid concerns regarding Iran's nuclear and related SSM programs, the Bush administration announced its intention of completing its long-range ballistic missile defense, mainly designed to defend against the developing North Korean threat, but also directed at the evolving long-range SSM (Intercontinental Ballistic Missile – ICBM, i.e. with ranges of more than 5,500 km) threat from Iran. This would be done by placing interceptor missile and radars in Europe, namely in Poland and the Czech Republic. Russia vehemently opposed the deployment, for a multitude of political and strategic reasons – primarily because it was felt that this would undermine Russia's strategic posture and its traditional interests in Eastern Europe, while a real long-range SSM threat from Iran was a long way down the timeline, in fact there was no such threat. Russia's view was that the program was more of a political affront than a bona fide attempt to defend the US and Europe against Iranian missiles.

In September 2009, the Obama administration cancelled the envisaged deployments in Poland and the Czech Republic, based on an updated intelligence threat assessment that an Iranian ICBM threat was developing much more slowly than previously assessed, while its Medium Range Ballistic Missile (MRBM – with ranges of between 800 and 3,500 kilometers) and Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile (IRBM – with ranges of between 3,500 and 5,500 kilometers) programs were proceeding at a much faster pace than previously assessed, thus warranting a revision of the US ballistic missile defense architecture. Based on this new assessment, the administration decided to shift the emphasis to the Aegis sea-based and SM-3 based four-phased "European Phased Adaptive Approach (PAA)", applicable equally, according to the BMDR, to other regions to be defended against ballistic missile threats. The next years will therefore be devoted to substantial increments in the production and deployment of systems already currently available, including in terms of increasing the order of battle and expanding deployments. Israel is expected to play a significant role in the eastern Mediterranean deployment, and is signified in the BMDR as a full partner in the program, along with Europe, NATO, Japan and the Republic of Korea.

At the Conference it was noted that the PAA may be misjudging the pace by which Iran is moving ahead on ICBM capability, and the underlying assessment, if wrong, will put the US behind the "power curve", with the current program unable to catch up with Iran's advancements. On the other hand, it was emphasized that the technology is available, and with appropriate funding the US will be able to make the attendant effort to catch up.

In introducing the new missile defense plan, Secretary Gates identified Israel along with Japan as the "early partners" of the new plan, referring specifically to US X-band sensors deployed to Israel and Israeli intercepting capabilities. This new deployment could be advantageous to Israel by integrating Israeli capabilities into a defense of Europe, and making Israel a component of European deterrence. The question of the relevance to NATO-Israel-US relationship is yet to be defined and will be further discussed in the near future. From an Israeli point of view, the near-term operational needs and strategic flexibility of the missile defense program are building blocks. But while Israeli systems are interoperable with the US-based Aegis ship-based system, Israel may not be in a position to risk over-stretching its operational capabilities as part of the PAA system. In sum, therefore, it was emphasized during the conference sessions devoted to BMD that Israel has much to gain from its partnership in the new BMD architecture.

During the Conference proceedings much of the discussion was devoted to technical issues. The various capabilities of the weapons systems already deployed, and those of the systems being developed and produced for future deployment, were detailed. It was emphasized that the systems involved are very

expensive, and that funding is only haltingly available to realize the declared plan, some systems having so far been clearly under-funded in comparison to their envisaged costs, but funding may be provided down the road. The BMDR includes firm declarations to the effect that the Obama administration is committed to the realization of the program and will ensure its funding.

During the Conference sessions, illustrations of the effectiveness of the different systems were demonstrated vis-à-vis the different threats envisaged, with regards to both the types and the geographical implications of these threats. It was emphasized that the new architecture is not designed to counter the traditional extensive threat from Russia or China, but is rather specifically designed to defend against North Korea and Iran. The BMDR elaborates on US homeland defense against ballistic missiles, including with respect to the continued retaining of Ground Based Interceptors (GBI's) currently deployed in Alaska and California, although the number of these has been at least temporarily frozen, and expansion of capabilities withheld. The BMDR also clearly states the intention of engaging Russia and China in envisaged cooperative BMD efforts, and that they are therefore not the targets of the current US program.

Phase 1 of the European PAA is to be deployed as of 2010 stretching until phase 2 is launched in 2015, and consists of substantially expanding the existing capabilities, including Patriot PAC-3, THAAD, the AN/TPY-2 X-band radar, and the sea-based Aegis system with SM-3 Block IA interceptor missiles. US capabilities, or ships, are still insufficient to meet all of the global security requirements. By 2011, the US will have upgraded ships and systems to deploy in Southern Europe. For Israel, Phase 1 will aid in its defense, and involves sensors and integration into the Israeli missile defense architecture. The increases in the presence of the Sixth Fleet in the region will provide a presence statement. Second, it brings together a much more robust set of sensors that can integrate in the Israeli ballistic missile defense architecture. Israel and the US are by far the two nations that have progressed the most in developing capabilities against those threats that exist in the region today.

Between 2010 and 2015, when phase 2 of PAA is envisaged, an increased availability of the Aegis systems and the currently available SM-3 Block IA interceptor missiles and the deployment of the more advanced SM-3 Block IB interceptor missile, will allow for the deployment of the systems on land, "Aegis ashore", thus facilitating earlier launch and greater ranges of interception. According to the BMDR, during this period Command, Control, Battle Management and Communications (C2BMC) will be upgraded too. It also states the Early Interception (EI) will continue to be explored.

Phase 2, as of 2015, envisages using proven capabilities of Aegis and building upon them, including the deployment of the more capable version of the SM-3 interceptor, the SM-3 Block IB, to be deployed in both sea- and land-based configurations, as well as more advanced sensors against short- and medium-range threats.

In phase 3, as of 2018, production and deployment of the currently under development new generation of interceptor missiles will begin, moving, though still with the designation of SM-3, from the 13-inch Block IB missiles to the 21-inch booster SM-3 Block IIA. This interceptor missile system will provide a response to the threat from Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBM's), including with respect to the defense of Northern Europe.

Phase 4 envisages that in 2020, production and deployment of the SM-3 Block IIB missile, incorporating the then available state of the art technologies, will begin, increasing yet again substantially the scope of the areas that can be defended. Basically, this will be a new missile that is intended to provide protection to Northern Europe and continental US, within a system that combines all of the established components.