

ISRAEL'S SECURITY STRATEGIES IN A REALIST FRAMEWORK: POWER, SURVIVAL, AND REGIONAL DYNAMICS

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Abstract

This paper discovers the security strategies of Israel through the prism of Realist theory in International Relations. Drawing on the principles of power, survival, and regional dynamics, this paper will further elaborate on how Israel moves within complex geopolitical landscape. The analysis highlights Israel's military capabilities, diplomatic maneuvers, and strategic alliances as key components of its approach to ensure national security and maintain regional influence.

Key words: Israel, USA, Middle East, realism, war, conflicts, strategic alliance, national interests.

Introduction

Realism, a dominant theory in International Relations, posits that states operate in an anarchic international system where the primary concern is survival through the accumulation and exercise of power. This framework is particularly applicable to Israel, a state which not only survived amidst hostile neighbors (both state and non-state actors) but also strategically positioned itself as a major power in the Middle East from the very beginning of its establishment.

Historical background

Prior to World War II, Europe was the primary location of the Jewish community. Jews constituted a significant part of the population of many European countries, especially in the East and Central parts of the region. Pogroms and the Holocaust with its final plan of The Final Solution [German: die Endlösung] or the Final Solution to the Jewish Question [German: Endlösung der Judenfrage] meant an intensification of Jewish persecution and served as a harbinger of total genocide. For Zionists, the intensification of anti-Semitic violence underscored the urgent necessity of creating a safe haven for the Jewish people as a matter of survival. This trend forced Jews to seek refuge abroad: in Britain, in America, but most in Palestine in order to realize the long-held dream of establishing an independent Jewish state in the Promised Land or "the land flowing with milk and honey" [Eretz Yisrael]. Notwithstanding the Balfour Declaration (1917) and subsequent support for the idea of a Jewish state, the Zionists finally lost faith in the British after the White Paper of 1939 and shifted their focus to the support of the United States, where there were also significant Jewish communities and where they could find more active support for the realization of their goals. In this regard, the first of the most prominent political support for the creation of a Jewish state on behalf of the official American government was support for UN Resolution 181 in 1947. The next significant indicator of support was the de facto recognition of the State of Israel by then U.S. President Harry Truman after 11 minutes of the establishment of independence on May 14, 1948 (North American Eastern Time). The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and subsequent conflicts, including the series of Arab-Israeli wars, Palestine-Israeli war and ongoing conflicts with militant groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah and Houthi movement have shaped its security strategies and foreign policy. Despite some uncertainties in bilateral relationship until 1960s, both USA and Israel repeatedly highlighted "the special relationship" between two nations and proved in action through various forms of political, economic, and military cooperation. Added to this, Israel holds a status of "major non-NATO ally" of USA since 1987. Although it is mistakenly believed that Israel could not survive without USA's support, Walter Russell Mead, a Professor of Foreign Affairs and Humanities at Yale University states that "Israel did not grow strong because it had an American alliance. It acquired an American alliance because it had

grown strong”. The country's precarious position in a strategically important but volatile region necessitates a robust approach to national defense and strategic alliances.

Key Tenets of Realism in Israel's Security Strategy

Self-Interest and State Behavior

Realism asserts that states are primarily driven by self-interest and the pursuit of power. Israel's security policies reflect this principle, as the state prioritizes its national interests and survival ever since its establishment. This focus on self-interest manifests in Israel's proactive defense measures and strategic alliances, especially with USA, aimed at preserving its sovereignty and regional dominance. After the victory of Israel in the 1967 Six-Day War, USA started to look at Israel as a strategic ally and a stabilizing force in the Middle East. This perception was influenced by Israel's military capabilities, its strategic location, and shared democratic values, which aligned with American interests in the region. Ever since Israel's establishment, the deterrent force was the only answer to the security problem. Ben Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister, had pursued this goal in two directions. The first being an alliance with one or more Western powers, which would formally guarantee the territorial integrity of Israel. The second was the development of a nuclear weapon, presumably with the help of France. The Arab nations could not crack the iron wall militarily and hence had to change their approach towards the conflict with Israel which later brought them to sign peace treaties and agreements with Egypt through Camp David Accords (1979), at Madrid Peace conference in 1991, with Jordan in 1994, with UAE, Bahrain and Morocco through Abraham Accords in 2020.

Anarchical Nature of the International System

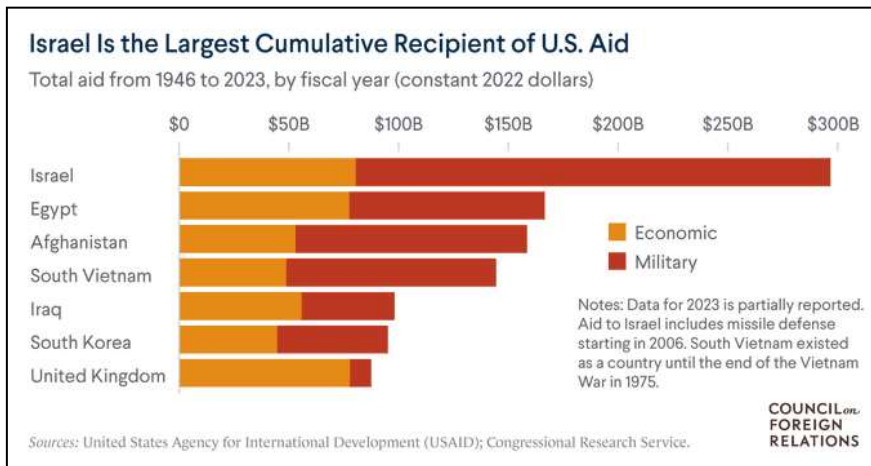
The international system is inherently anarchic, with no central authority to enforce rules or norms. In such an environment, Israel operates under the assumption that it must rely on its own capabilities to ensure security. This anarchical context drives Israel to maintain a strong military and engage in strategic deterrence to protect against potential threats. Given the absence of a global governing body to provide security guarantees, Israel has developed a self-reliant approach to national defense. This entails a significant investment in military technology, intelligence capabilities, and advanced defense systems. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), a

research institute focused on conflict and armaments, Israel spent \$23.4 billion on its military in 2022. Over the period from 2018 to 2022, this spending translates to \$2,535 per capita, making Israel the world's second-largest military spender per capita, after Qatar. In 2022, military expenditure accounted for 4.5 percent of Israel's gross domestic product (GDP), the 10th highest percentage globally. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) are equipped with cutting-edge technology, including missile defense systems like the Iron Dome, David's Sling, and Arrow systems, which are designed to intercept and neutralize incoming threats from missiles and rockets. Anarchical nature of the international system can also be exemplified by the current dynamics in the Middle East. Israeli army continues Gaza offensive despite international pressure.

Power and Dominance

Power is a central concept in Realism, with states constantly striving to maximize their influence and capabilities. Israel's emphasis on military strength, technological superiority, and intelligence operations exemplifies its pursuit of power. This focus on power is designed to deter adversaries and maintain Israel's position as a dominant regional actor. Three of the most well-known and significant wars between Arab countries and Israel were "the War of Independence" (1947-1949), "the Six Day War" in 1967, and the "Yom Kippur War" in 1973. In terms of dominance and military outcome, Israel is generally seen as the victor in the first two wars, while the outcome of the third war is more complex, highlighting its weighty role in the Middle Eastern politics. In recent years, Israel has faced a profound shift in its security landscape, largely shaped by Iran's ambitious quest for regional dominance. Central to these challenges is Iran's concerted efforts to attain nuclear military capabilities and extend its influence across several key regional theaters, including Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, and the Gaza Strip. This has compelled Israel to adopt a more assertive stance in safeguarding its national security interests by enhancing military readiness and technological superiority. Israel has invested heavily in advanced defense systems, intelligence capabilities, and cyber security to counter potential threats from Iran and its regional proxies. Additionally, Israel has deepened its cooperation with international allies, particularly the United States and key European nations, to strengthen diplomatic efforts aimed at isolating Iran and

imposing effective sanctions. More importantly, Israel is the largest cumulative recipient of U.S. aid.



Militarily, Israel has conducted preemptive strikes against perceived threats, aiming to disrupt hostile activities before they pose direct threats to Israeli territory.¹ This proactive approach underscores Israel's commitment to maintaining regional stability and preventing Iran from achieving its hegemonic ambitions at the expense of Israel's security.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Israel's security strategies, analyzed through the lens of Realist theory in International Relations, underscore its unwavering commitment to power, survival, and navigating complex regional dynamics. From its inception, Israel has prioritized self-interest and strategic alliances, particularly with the United States, to safeguard its sovereignty and regional influence. By leveraging technological superiority and international partnerships, Israel continues to assert itself as a pivotal player in Middle Eastern geopolitics, adapting dynamically to ensure its security in an ever-evolving global landscape.

¹ MUELLER, KARL P., et al. "APPENDIX B: Israeli Preemptive and Preventive Attack Cases." *Striking First: Preemptive and Preventive Attack in U.S. National Security Policy*, 1st ed., RAND Corporation, 2006, pp. 189–218. *JSTOR*, available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/mg403af.13>.

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