RIVALRY BETWEEN IRAN AND ISRAEL: THE NEXT WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST?

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INTRODUCTION

The Iranian Revolution in 1979 was a breakaway point between Iran and Israel. The revolution was the genesis of a hostility that could lead to a possible war in the future. However unlikely it (war) used to appear in the past, the present crisis—particularly since the end of the Syrian civil war—and the ongoing proxy war could also precipitate a war between Iran and Israel. The Syrian civil war has made Iran the most potent power in the region and, therefore, its old rhetoric of eliminating Israel from the map of the world[1] is no longer a hoax; this has alarmed Israel. The recent exchanges of missiles from the Syrian base and the response from Israel[2] have

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1. Avi Issacharoff, "Iran vs. Israel: Is a Major War Ahead?", *The Atlantic*, May 11, 2018. Available at https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/05/iran-israel-syria/560210/; Tamar Pileggi, "Khamenei: Israel a 'Cancerous Tumor' that 'Must be Eradicated'", *The Times of Israel*, June 4, 2018. Available athttps://www.timesofisrael.com/khamenei-israel-a-cancerous-tumor-that-must-be-eradicated/. Accessed on November 1, 2018.
2. Isabel Kershner, "Israel Confirms Attacks on Iranian Targets in Syria", *The New York Times*, January 20, 2019. Available at https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/20/world/middleeast/israel-attack-syria-iran.html; Jack Khoury, Yaniv Kubovich and Noa Shpigel, "Syria Says Israel Struck in Damascus; 'Unlikely Hezbollah Members Targeted'", *Hareetz*,

been more frequent than before. In May 2018, the Israeli Air Force carried out extensive attacks against Iranian military targets in Syria in response to Iranian rockets being fired against Israel.[3] It is, therefore, important to understand what the current nature of this conflict is and what could be a possible scenario beyond the political rhetoric often used by both sides. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu has sharpened his tone and announced that he would attack anyone who harms Israel[4]—this was in response to an old threat of eliminating Israel made by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).[5]

The exchanges across the Syrian border have alarmed Israel about a possible full-front war. The exchange of heated rhetoric, however, from both sides has often made headlines in the past, with Israel referring to Iran not only as an enemy of Israel but as the primary security threat for the entire West Asian region.[6] This has been echoed by many Sunni Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia. The probability of a full scale war, however, depends on a host of factors, viz. domestic, regional and even from a global perspective. At the domestic level, the Palestinian question has remained a major bone of contention between these two rivals. Iran's support to Hamas since the first Intifada[7] and its position on Jerusalem—which the

December 27, 2018. Available at https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/syria-says-israel-struck-in-damascus-unlikely-hezbollah-members-targeted-1.6783667. Accessed on January 4, 2019.

3. Issacharoff, n. 1.
4. Angus McDowall, and Dan Williams, "Israel Strikes in Syria in More Open Assault on Iran", *Reuters*, January 21, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-israel-strikes/israeli-military-strikes-iranian-targets-in-syria-idUSKCN1PE0Y2. Accessed on January 25, 2019.
5. Jeffrey Goldberg, "The Iranian Regime on Israel's Right to Exist", *The Atlantic*, March 9, 2015. Available at https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/03/Iranian-View-of-Israel/387085/. Accessed on December 5, 2018. Julian Robinson, "Iran 'is Impatient to Fight Israel and Eliminate it from the Earth': Threat after Israeli Missile Attack on Tehran Forces in Syria Leaves 11 Dead", *Mailonline*, January 21, 2019. Available at https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6614431/Israeli-bombardment-Syria-kills-11-monitor.html. Accessed on January 25, 2019.
6. "Liberman to Mattis: Iran is 'Greatest Threat' in Middle East 'and Beyond'", *The Times of India* April 27, 2018. Available at https://www.timesofisrael.com/liberman-to-mattis-iran-is-greatest-threat-in-middle-east-and-beyond/. Accessed on December 2, 2018.
7. For more details on the Intifada, see Zachary Lockman and Joel Beinin, eds., *Intifada: The Palestinian Uprising Against Israeli Occupation* (Washington DC: MERIP Books, 1989); "Iranian Leaders Vow to Back Hamas in Fight Against Israel", *Times of Israel*

Iranians call Al Quds (Arabic name of Jerusalem)—has a domestic implication. Every year, Iran celebrates Al Quds Day[8], and on every occasion, the Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei commands legitimacy from the Iranian people as well as from the larger Shia population all over the Middle East—from Iraq to Lebanon, and from Bahrain to Syria.

Another dimension is regional. The history of the Arab-Israeli conflict since the Nakba[9] in 1948 and the formation of the State of Israel; the Six-Day War in 1967, and, more significantly, the 1973 War between Egypt and Israel, have cast a discernible shadow on Arab-Israel relations. But the 1979 Iranian revolution changed the politics of the region. The Arabs, led by Saudi Arabia, found Iran a bigger threat than Israel; as a result, the new reality is that barring Qatar, Israel has become an indispensable player for the Arab rulers to counter Iran. Lastly, the global dimension also holds major significance. Since the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011, the Russian presence has made the region a real game of thrones. Iran, along with Syria, harbours the Russian camp and the rest have aligned themselves with the US. The Arab-Israeli conflict and Palestinian question have remained under the shadow of the continuous cold war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. This new reality has helped Israel to exploit the insecurity of the Arab rulers against Iran. In the backdrop of this changing cartography of politics in the region, the Iran-Israel confrontation could take the region into further chaos. To map these dimensions and their consequences in the realm of a possible war between Iran and Israel, one needs to link the genealogy of the historical rivalry between Iran and Israel to offer a meaningful understanding of the present chaos.

THE GENEALOGY OF CONFLICT

The genealogy of the rivalry finds its presence in the Iranian revolution of 1979. Before 1979, during the Shah's period, the relationship was

December 12, 2017. Available at https://www.timesofisrael.com/iranian-leaders-vow-to-back-hamas-in-fight-against-israel/. Accessed on November 4, 2018.

8. "Iran Marks International Quds Day", *Tehran Times* , June 8, 2018. Available at https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/424229/Iran-marks-International-Quds-Day. Accessed on December 2, 2018.
9. For more details, see H Sa'di, Ahmad and Lila Abu-Lughod, *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

indeed better; possibly also because of the bonhomie between the US and Iran. After the revolution, Khomeini saw Israel as a Zionist regime and viewed it through the same lens that the Iranians used for viewing the United States and other Western countries, including Russia. But the real confrontation started during the 1982 Lebanon War[10] during which Israel targeted the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) to eliminate its operations from Lebanon. The birth of Hezbollah was a product of Israel's operations in Lebanon. Since then, Hezbollah represents the most lethal Iranian proxy in the region and has been involved in every direct and indirect operation against Israel. Hezbollah has developed a close network with Hamas and other anti-Israel forces.

In 2006, Israel had to withdraw from Lebanon; this gave Hezbollah—and in the larger scheme of things, Iran—a moral victory. Hezbollah and Hamas have received incessant support in their operations against Israel. Hamas, however, stopped taking support after Iran declared unconditional support to the Assad regime. It may be recalled that Hamas, an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, had been fighting against Assad. For Iran, however, saving Assad was a bigger game plan. Iran was instrumental in saving Assad but only after luring Shia militias from all over the world, including from Pakistan, through the IRGC.[11] These historical accounts are a testimony of Iran's position against Israel. After Hamas, Iran has openly embraced the Islamic Jihad for fighting against Israel.[12] In 2012, Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei said, "The Zionist regime is a true cancer tumor on

10. For details on the 1982 War, see Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari, *Israel's Lebanon War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984).
11. Phillip Smyth, "Iran Is Outpacing Assad for Control of Syria's Shia Militias", The Washington Institute Policy Analysis, Policy Watch 2955, April 12, 2018. Available at https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/iran-is-outpacing-assad-for-control-of-syrias-shia-militias. Accessed on January 2, 2019. Martin Chulov, Saeed Kamali Dehghan and Patrick Wintour, "Iran Hails Victory in Aleppo as Shia Militias Boost Syria's Bashar al-Assad", *The Guardian*, December 14, 2016. Available at https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/14/iran-aleppo-syria-shia-militia. Accessed on January 2, 2019.
12. Yaniv Kubovich, "Iran's Fighting Force in Gaza, Calling and Firing the Shots: This Is Islamic Jihad in Palestine", *Haaretz*, June 17, 2018. Available at https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/iran/.premium-what-is-islamic-jihad-in-palestine-iran-s-fighting-force-in-gaza-calling-and-firing-the-shots-1.6158730. Accessed on November 4, 2018.

this region that should be cut off".[13] Later, in November 2014, the supreme leader gave a nine-point agenda to eliminate Israel.[14] The hatred and animosity between Iran and Israel have many trajectories. Israel was the US' major supporter in the Gulf War, and Iraq, under Saddam, was a bigger threat to it than Iran. Before the Lebanon War, Israel attacked Iraq's nuclear site in 1981 under Operation Opera, also known as Operation Babylon.[15] Since then, Iran has remained the major threat for the state of Israel. Israel has been a vocal supporter of military action against Iran and has been involved in many covert and overt operations, including killing Iranian nuclear scientists.[16] After Saddam, Israel's major security concern has been Iran, and Israel has tried to persuade the United States on many occasions to destroy Iran.[17] It is important to first understand the US-Israel relationship to fully comprehend the history of confrontation between Iran and Israel.

THE US FACTOR

The Iran-Israel rivalry has always been shaped by the US factor. The revolution was a shock for many in the US government who were in denial over the fact that the Shah could be overthrown. A new

13. Tamar Pileggi, "Khamenei: Israel a 'Cancerous Tumor' that 'Must be Eradicated'", *The Times of Israel*, June 4, 2018. Available at https://www.timesofisrael.com/khamenei-israel-a-cancerous-tumor-that-must-be-eradicated/. Accessed on February 2, 2019.
14. Ayatollah Khamenei Twitter account, "Why Should & how can #Israel be eliminated? Ayatollah Khamenei's answer to 9 key questions", November 9, 2014. Available at https://twitter.com/khamenei_ir/status/531366667377717248/photo/1. Accessed on January 2, 2019. Winer, Stuart and Marissa Newman, "Iran Supreme Leader Touts 9-Point Plan to Destroy Israel", *The Times of Israel*, November 10, 2014. Available at https://www.timesofisrael.com/iran-supreme-leader-touts-9-point-plan-to-destroy-israel/. Accessed on January 2, 2019.
15. Amos Perlmutter, Michael I. Handel and Uri Bar-Joseph, *Two Minutes Over Baghdad* (London and Oregon: Frank Cass, 2003), https://warfarehistorynetwork.com/daily/military-history/operation-babylon-israels-strike-on-al-tuwaitha/. Accessed on January 4, 2019.
16. Sebastien Roblin, "How Israel Tried to Destroy Iran's Nuclear Program: Assassinate the Scientists", *The National Interest* June 2, 2018. Available at: https://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/how-israel-tried-destroy-irans-nuclear-program-assassinate-26085. Accessed on December 2, 2018. Bozorgmehr Sharafedin, "Iran Sentences 'Mossad Agent' to Death Over Scientist killings", *Reuters*, October 24, 2017. Available at https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-court/iran-sentences-mossad-agent-to-death-over-scientist-killings-idUSKBN1CT1XU. Accessed on December 2, 2018.
17. Jonathan Steele, "Israel Asked US for Green Light to Bomb Nuclear Sites in Iran", *The Guardian*, September 25, 2008. Available at https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/sep/25/iran.israelandthepalestinians1. Accessed on December 4, 2018.

low between Iran and the United States was reached when the US Embassy in Tehran was captured for 444 days by revolutionaries, with the direct support of Ayatollah Khomeini.[18] During the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88) US and Israel provided arms support to both Iran and Iraq and this was humiliating for Khomeini. For a majority of Iranians, this fact has always been kept in the dark and is not a part of the political discourse in Iran even today. In the post-1967 Six-Day War scenario during the Cold War period, Israel was a strategic partner for the United States. Since 1967, the US has given Israel unconditional support and the Israeli lobby has been extremely influential in shaping US foreign policy in the Middle East. The 1973 oil embargo made oil a strategic weapon against the US and its partners, including Israel. Since then, Israel has been the closest ally for the US not only in the region but beyond. The US factor, therefore, dominates as the most crucial dimension in the case of any possible war between Iran and Israel. For Israel, US is the custodian of its security and except during the Iranian nuclear deal, it has always managed the US position in its favour. The vetoes in the UN against all international laws, and its settler colonial project in the West Bank and Gaza, testify to the strong relations between the US and Israel. The Ahmadinejad period in Iran was a significant phase in the Israel-Iran rivalry, when Iran even disputed the Jewish holocaust.[19] Between Rafsanjani and Khatami, Iran took a moderate path, with pragmatism in its foreign policy, but the return of Ahmadinejad bolstered the position of the conservatives and the power of supreme leaders, and since then, the rivalry has reached a new phase of hot pursuit and regular confrontation from both sides.

18. John Kifner, "How a Sit-In Turned into a Siege", *The New York Times Magazine*, May 17, 1981. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/1981/05/17/magazine/how-a-sit-in-turned-into-a-siege.html. Accessed on January 2, 2019. See also Mark Bowden, *Guests of the Ayatollah* (New York: Grove Press, 2006).
19. Bozorgmehr Sharafedin, "Why Iran Takes Issue with the Holocaust", BBC News, October 9, 2013. Available at https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-24442723. Accessed on December 4, 2018. "Holocaust a Myth, says Iranian President", *The Guardian* December 14, 2015. Available at https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/dec/14/iran.secondworldwar. Accessed on December 4, 2018. Parisa Hafezi, and Firouz Sedarat, "Ahmadinejad says Holocaust a lie, Israel has no Future", Reuters, September 18, 2009. Available at https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran/ahmadinejad-says-holocaust-a-lie-israel-has-no-future-idUSTRE58H17S20090918. Accessed on December 2, 2018.

In October 2010, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg and Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Daniel Ayalon released a joint statement[20] calling Iran one of the "greatest challenges" to stability in West Asia and reconfirmed a US-Israeli effort to prevent the country from developing nuclear weapons. The nuclear deal was a significant shift from the US' point of view. In the aftermath of the Arab uprisings, the US zeroed in on Iran as a responsible power to bring stability to the region, much to the chagrin of many in Israel and the Saudi monarchy as well. Later, the US invasion in 2003, supported by Israel, had many unsavoury consequences. The absence of institutions and support to dictators against the will of the people brought the region into the hands of non-state actors. The birth of the Islamic State was a product of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the resulting sectarianism within Iraq. Iran, however, expanded its influence by exploiting the sectarian malice, first in Iraq and later in the different parts of West Asia, particularly in Syria. These issues have given Iran an advantage to leverage its position against Saudi Arabia and Israel. The cold war between Saudi Arabia and Iran, the deep sectarianism, and the weakening US position helped Israel as the world's attention shifted from Israel's settler colonial project in the Palestinian territory. Although the nuclear deal was the lowest phase in US-Israel relations, the arrival of President Trump and the clout of the evangelical Christians and Jewish lobby in the US has turned the relationship around. With the announcement to shift the US Embassy (in Israel) to Jerusalem, President Trump has willy-nilly jeopardised the peace process. Iran, through its many proxies, has openly threatened to renew its support for the war in Gaza.

THE ROLE OF SAUDI ARABIA

The dimension of Saudi Arabia is another important factor that directly or indirectly affects Iran-Israel relations. In the last many decades, the fight for supremacy between Iran and Saudi Arabia for becoming the leader of the 'Muslim world' has given sectarianism a global face. Since the revolution in 1979 the Saudi

20. "Iran's Nuclear Program Poses a Major Risk to Mideast Stability", *Haaretz*, October 19, 2010. Available at https://www.haaretz.com/1.5127614. Accessed on December 4, 2018.

monarchs have always feared the revolutionary ideas emanating from Iran and accused Tehran of interfering in the domestic affairs of Saudi Arabia. Ever since the revolution, the security of the eastern province of Saudi Arabia has been a serious concern for Riyadh. The export of the *Wahhabi* brand of Islam was the Saudis' response to the Iranian revolution. Saudi Arabia is a close partner of the US and despite historically opposing Israel and its acts in Palestine in the recent past, the Saudi-Iran cold war has led Riyadh and Tel Aviv to forge a strategic alliance against Iran. Saudi Arabia accuses Iran of using the Houthi proxies in Yemen and has even sought support from the US to marginalise Tehran. The recent Gulf crisis over Qatar also points to Tehran. The 'Yemen Model', as many argue, is Iran's strategic use of proxies against its rival. For Riyadh, stopping Iran and its agenda of expanding the Shia crescent in the Arab world—an unacceptable act—has, therefore, precipitated the emerging contact between Saudi and Israel towards a new alliance. Saudi Arabia is yet to establish official relations with Israel, but the recent chain of events may pave the way for that possibility. Netanyahu's visit to Oman;[21] the use of Saudi air space for Israeli airplanes; the muted criticism on Israel's actions in Palestine and the limited response to the Jerusalem question have emboldened Israel to counter Tehran. Israel has supported Saudi Arabia indirectly in the Yemen War by threatening Iran against any attempt to close the Bab-el Mandeb[22] near the Red Sea. Recently, Netanyahu sent an olive branch to Prince Mohammad Bin Salman and called for a united front against

21. Noa Landau, and Jack Khoury, "Netanyahu Visits Oman, Which Has No Diplomatic Ties With Israel", *Haaretz*, Ocrtober 27, 2018. Available at https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/netanyahu-secretly-visits-oman-which-has-no-diplomatic-ties-with-israel-1.6594761. Accessed on January 2, 2019. "Israel's Prime Minister Visits Oman, an Arab Monarchy—and is Welcomed", *The Economist*, November 3, 2018. Available at https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2018/11/03/israels-prime-minister-visits-oman-an-arab-monarchy-and-is-welcomed. Accessed on 2 January, 2019.
22. "Israeli Premier Warns of Military Action if Iran Shuts Bab al-Mandab Strait on Red Sea", *Albawaba News*, August 2, 2018. Available at https://www.albawaba.com/news/israeli-warns-military-action-if-iran-shuts-bab-al-mandab-strait-red-sea-1167768. Accessed on December 4, 2018. "Israel Warns Iran of Military Response if it Closed Key Red Sea Strait", *Reuters*, August 1, 2018. Available at https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-redsea/israel-warns-iran-of-military-response-if-it-closed-key-red-sea-strait-idUSKBN1KM5VM. Accessed on January 2, 2019.

Tehran by offering his support on the issue of Jamal Khashoggi. The Saudi-Iran cold war has cemented Israel's acceptance among the Sunni Arab countries. Israel already has close networks with Jordan and Egypt. This mutual hatred for Iran has helped Israel and has completely debunked the Palestinian question.

PALESTINIAN QUESTION

The changing dynamics in the region have put the Palestinian issue into deep slumber. The cold war between Iran and Saudi Arabia has not only helped Israel's strategy in the wider Middle East but completely reduced the Palestinian question. In all possibility, despite Iran's open support to many proxies against Israel, a large number of Palestinians believe that the Palestinian issue is no longer an Arab cause[23]. Although the Arab states still give financial aid to Palestine, the absence of robust political support is a new reality. Since the rise of Hamas, Iran had been actively engaged in the Palestine issue, but the Syrian civil war has sequestered its (Hamas') relations with Tehran; Hamas' proximity with the Muslim Brotherhood, and Iran's position on supporting the brutal regime of Assad were the reasons for the fall-out. However, Iran embraces parties like the Islamic Jihad and calls for all support to eliminate Israel. But in this entire political theatre, the Palestinian question has suffered a huge setback and Iran has much to be blamed for. The continued interference in Saudi Arabia using its proxies in Yemen, in Lebanon and Bahrain—and, therefore, the fear of 'Shia expansionism'—has resulted in the authoritative Sunni regimes of the Gulf and others becoming overtly dependent on the US and also secretly engaging with Israel.

THE PRESENT CHAOS

Since the Syrian civil war, Iran has been providing military arms and financial support to Hezbollah and other proxies through the IRGC. The IRGC works under the direct command of the supreme leader in Iran and has been the real beneficiary of the Iranian economy in the name of Iranian security. The clout of the supreme leader and

23. Policy and Survey Research (ND), "Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No-57". Available at http://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/621. Accessed on December 4, 2019.

his direct connection with all the proxies through the IRGC and Al Quds forces could lead to a possible hot war between Iran and Israel. Since the start of the Syrian civil war, Iran's real aim was not only to safeguard the Assad regime or to defeat the Islamic State but, most significantly, to have an army of war veterans under the support of the IRGC and other Shia militias from different parts of the world to support Hezbollah in a larger war with Israel at the Golan Heights. Historically, since its defeat in 1982 and till 2011, Syria was in no position to confront Israel, and any action, therefore, would have helped Israel to destroy Syria. The civil war in Syria has brought Iran into the region and the present, therefore, could lead to a war with Israel—as manifest in the recent remarks by the Iranian leadership on Israel.[24] The possible war and the present collision also reflect a new dimension: the mute response from the global powers, especially the US and Russia. The vacuum can jeopardise the possibility of reconciliation among all the regional and global players on the Syrian issue. The exchange of the massive missile attacks near the Syrian border between Israel and Iranian proxies in the last few days also made headlines on social media—a new weapon for state propaganda. Recently, the Israeli defence forces were found trolling Iran on social media.[25]

CONCLUSION

The rivalry between Iran and Israel has arrived to a new reality where the rhetoric would cease in the case of a direct confrontation. Whether these recent attacks would lead to certain war would depend on how far both states can confront each other. However, considering their military strength, the war may plunge the entire West Asian region into turmoil. The domestic factors are compelling

24. Cassandra Gomes-Hochberg,"Iran's Khamenei Meets Islamic Jihad Leaders, Calls For Israel's Downfall", *Jerusalem Post*, December 13, 2018. Available at https://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Iran-News/Irans-leader-meets-Islamic-Jihad-leaders-calls-for-Israels-downfall-575951. Accessed on January 2, 2019. Anshel Pfeffer, "Israel and Iran Are on a Collision Course in Syria – and the U.S. and Russia Don't Care", *Haaretz*, January 21, 2019. Available at https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israel-and-iran-are-on-a-collision-course-in-syria-and-u-s-and-russia-don-t-care-1.6865766. Accessed on February 2, 2019.
25. Jared Keller, "Israel To Iran: Too Close For Missiles, I'm Switching To Tweets", *Task and Purpose*, January 21, 2019. Available at https://taskandpurpose.com/israel-iran-syria-strikes-tweet. Accessed on February 2, 2019.

for both powers to use their overt and covert operations to seek larger legitimacy. The Netanyahu government is facing serious corruption charges and its recent national citizens' laws have further divided the country on ethnic lines. Tehran, on the other hand, is having its own trouble and in the last few years since the green revolution in 2009, the streets of Iran have often been major sites of protests, including in Qom. Ali Khamenei too has faced criticism and the voice for more power to the people would compel the authorities to change their position. The short term can see a strategic plan by these states to quell any domestic protest and seek further legitimacy through war-mongering. But the regional dimension is more compelling than the domestic one. The existing rivalries and emerging relations may bring Iran and Israel into a short war to seek regional hegemony. For Tehran, any disengagement of the global powers will create a vacuum that will help its influence in the Fertile Crescent and can challenge Saudi Arabia. The Palestinian angle would help Iran to seek legitimacy from the Arabs who have been marginalised after all hopes for the Arab Spring died sooner than they had expected. Iran is likely to exploit the anger of the Arab world on the Palestinian question. For Israel, any such possibility will make it more acceptable for the Arab regimes. How the regional dynamics will play out remains to be seen.

The global dimension may have a veto in quelling any possible war, or the other way around. For the US, West Asia will always remain central to its foreign policy to maintain its hegemony and, therefore, Israel will remain its closest ally. The US position on Iran is more belligerent than in the recent past and for Trump in the White House, along with Pompeo and John Bolton as his associates, any action from Iran would, therefore, allow the United States to directly engage in the war. The UN position would be further marginalised in that situation. In this scenario, Russia can be the most important player, like in Syria. Tehran would find it difficult to refuse the Russian demands considering its reasonably good relations with Israel, but it would all depend on how much the global powers would engage in reducing the tension. Numerous issues are forging the new realities and all these permutations and combinations would determine whether war would be a real possibility or remain a plank to gain

domestic legitimacy. Benny Morris, the celebrated Israeli historian, has recently predicted a doomsday for Israel but it depends on how different dimensions shape up in the future. In the final analysis, West Asia is likely to remain in a state of chaos, with an uncertain future.